"*To live the story is to tell it, to ourselves and possibly to others; and in this case to retell it again and again, revisiting it as we go along.*"

(Carr, 1986, p.96)

University of Alberta

Arts-Based Narrative Inquiry: A Rural Carpet-Weaving Family in Iran

by

Sima Khorrami

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to gather oral and visual narratives to provide a voice to rural carpet-weaving women and their children in Iran. Through narrative and photography the study provides insight into the daily lives of women and children in a small, home-based family-run carpet making operation in rural Iran. The dynamics of everyday life were explored in a rural carpet-making family with particular focus on the role of the female weaver, who not only engages in the household chores, but also is the primary producer of carpets. Women carpet weavers are preservers of culture and history by creating an artifact that is embedded with their narrative and identity. The weavers' stories and participation are valuable as repositories for heritage and artistry.

The research objectives were to explore: 1) the nature of an Iranian family-run carpet-weaving operation within a rural setting; 2) the role of women and their children in making the carpets; 3) the role of the women as the primary weavers and as agents of preserving carpets as cultural and historical artifacts and as keepers of stories told and re-told through generations of family circles; and 4) the role of the women as contributors to the household economy.

Conducted as an arts-based narrative inquiry, the study reveals the past experiences, present adaptations and future aspirations of three generations of Iranian women in a rural carpet cottage industry. The visual and narrative field texts composed through interviews, journaling, photography and videography and by photo-elicitation [from the co-participants and by the researcher who is a Canadian immigrant originally from Iran], sheds a multi-dimensional light on the lives of women and children carpet weavers in one family in rural Iran. The study also attends to the social relations among

family members and their surrounding community, and the role of rural carpet-weaving in preserving traditional carpet-production techniques within an aesthetic, cultural and historical context. The visual and oral stories of the women confirm the continuing existence of an economic system that subordinates women's roles, the continuation of traditional Iranian patriarchal gender relations and the existence of an informal matriarchy.

Dedicated to all the piece workers of the world

Sima Khorrami

سیماخرمی

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gather oral and visual narratives that would give a voice to rural carpet-weaving women and their children in Iran. Through narrative and photography the study provides insights into the daily lives of women and children in a small, home-based family-run carpet-making operation in rural Iran. I explored the dynamics of everyday life in a rural carpet-weaving family, with particular focus on carpets as a central historic artifact and economic foundation of the family. I focused on the role of the female weaver as the central character in the preservation of this cultural and historical artifact, embedded with the creator's narrative and identity that not only engages in the household chores, but also is the primary producer of the carpets. The women's stories and participation are valuable as repositories for heritage and artistry.

The research objectives were to explore: 1) the nature of an Iranian family-run carpet-weaving operation within a rural setting; 2) the role of women and their children in making the carpets; 3) the role of the women as the primary weavers, and as agents of preserving carpets as cultural and historical artifacts, and as well as keepers of stories told and re-told through generations of family circles; and 4) the role of the women as contributors to the household economy.

Conducted as an arts-based narrative inquiry, the study reveals the past experiences, present adaptations and future aspirations of three generations of Iranian women in the rural carpet cottage industry. The visual and narrative field texts composed through interviews, journaling, photography and videography and by photo-elicitation (from the co-participants and by the researcher who is a Canadian immigrant originally

from Iran), sheds a multi-dimensional light on the lives of women and children carpet weavers in one family in rural Iran. The study also attends to the social relations among family members and their surrounding community, and the role of rural carpet-weaving in preserving traditional carpet-production techniques within an aesthetic, cultural and historical context. The visual and oral stories of the family members confirm the continuing existence of an economic system that subordinates women's roles, the continuation of traditional Iranian patriarchal gender relations and the existence of an informal matriarchy.

The dissertation begins with an in-depth description of the research focus in Chapter One; offers a review of relevant literature concerning theoretical, ideological and methodological underpinnings in Chapter Two; and presents arts-based narrative inquiry including photography as the research methodologies in Chapter Three. Chapter Four summarizes the researcher's journey to Iran with photographic and narrative accounts of personal observations, communications and reflections. Chapter Five weaves three dimensions of the research experience together: 1) the narrative accounts of each member of Abdol's carpet-weaving family; 2) researcher observations and personal reflections composed in the field notes and journal writings; and 3) photographs taken by family members and those taken by the researcher along the way. Chapter Six revisits the literature review in the earlier chapters in the context of the research experience, weaves together a metaphorical carpet in an illustration of the warps and wefts affecting women's lives in Iran and discusses how the narratives of the Iranian carpet-weaving women reflect back to the researcher's personal reflections, observations and insights.

Background: The Research and the Researcher

The production of carpets has been an economic mainstay for Iran for over four hundred years. The sixteenth century (Safavid era) through the nineteenth century (Qajar era) were an extraordinarily rich period witnessed a dramatic expansion from a traditional focus on regional and national economies to the emergence of a global economy. During most of this time, the end users of carpets were the noble classes both inside and outside Iran. Today, the income generated by the export of Iranian carpets is second only to the income generated by the export of oil (Iran Chamber of Commerce, 2000). Carpets no longer reside solely in the halls of the wealthy as conspicuous consumers; with just a quick trip to Ikea, middle class families in Europe and North America can adorn their living room floors with luxurious carpets handmade in Iran.

To keep up with the demand from the West, modes of carpet production have shifted from the traditional and intimate sphere of the rural household - where carpets are primarily made by women - to urban workshops where carpet makers tend to be men. In spite of the general market demand for Persian carpets, there still exists the desire for authentic carpets produced by rural craftspeople. There is a significant understanding and knowledge about the authenticity of indigenous woven carpets among the general public and scholars (Glassie, 1999; Helfgott, 1994; Spooner, 1986) but what is often neglected is the making of these carpets within the intimate space of the family habitat and the role of women in creating these pieces of authentic artwork. What is also neglected is the role of rural carpet-weaving families in maintaining and preserving culturally and historically significant artifacts.

Carpets woven by villagers carry not only the aura of their authenticity, but also embody different social contexts within the intimate space of the family. When carpets leave their rural private space for the new public space, the bazaar, they become a commodity that is exchangeable. Once they are purchased and placed in private spaces they take on new meanings for the owners. Marx (1977) and Miller (1987) state "commodity fetishism stems from the separation of the consumer from the mystery of production" (as cited in McGuckin, 1997, p. 292). Consumer goods appear as the anonymous products of capital available through the exchange of money, itself an abstraction rather than the products of human labour. The social significance of carpets in relation to the family and, in particular, women's contributions in producing such an art piece in order to provide the "soul for the home" should not be overlooked. Women's 'voices' within the carpet-weaving social context needs to be recognized.

When I was a child in Iran, I remember going to the market with my mother and looking at the layers of carpets filling the carpet merchant's store. People gathered around the carpets, leafing through the piles of rich patterns as if they were paging through a heavy manuscript, raising dust, which hung in the rays of sun piercing the roof of the bazaar. Sometimes, carpets were placed on the ground in the corridors of the bazaar, intentionally allowing people to walk on them so the carpets would lose their freshness and look old. I used to hate carpets simply because of their ubiquitousness. I saw carpets present and used in every household as status symbols, and as representing a social narrative associated with wealth and prestige. Their abundance overwhelmed and repelled me.

However, later in life, when I became an expatriate whose ties to my country had

become almost imaginary, I began to look again at the place of carpets both in my cultural history and my personal identity. I began to reclaim the connection with this rich library of spatial narrative from which I had once been estranged and I developed a desire to reread and give significance to carpets. Particularly as a female visual artist, I felt connected to the women who weave the carpets. Their creativity and mine connected us through threads of mutual identity. When I was still living with my parents, I refused to have my room covered with carpet and instead I requested a cheap floor covering called *kilim*, a tapestry-like hand woven rug. Yet here in Canada my floors are covered with Persian carpets of all kinds and all different regions. I am now interested in the stories of carpets and when I visit with my parents I ask questions as if I am a little child. My father told me that my aunt used to have an '*Ostad*' [a master craftsperson] coming to their home to teach my aunt how to make carpets. It was very common for women in her generation to learn carpet-weaving. We had a set of chairs in our guest room, the seats of which were made with navy blue carpet with bouquets of roses on both seats and backs. I remember my mother's fussiness about choosing the right wool and right color to give to the carpet weaver, who wove the small carpets which my mother would later cover chairs with them. My mother now has two of the finest hand woven carpets framed and hanging on the wall of her living room here in Canada.

For centuries, rural carpet making was viewed as a means of economic survival. Women were invisible producers working under unfair and unhealthy conditions and in subordination within a patriarchal system. Women produced the carpets sold by the men in their families to support the family, yet the role of women and other family members as the producers and preservers of heritage artifacts has been neglected by researchers.

The present study confirms that women might seem to be invisible in the eyes of the outsider, but their existence and contribution to the household economy and to national, historical and cultural heritage are significant. For this reason their voices need to be heard.

The art of making carpets and the stories woven into them move through a spatial timeframe from the past to the present and into the future. The movement of narrative and artistic creations within and across the generations of rural family carpet-weaving resonates with my life as an Iranian-Canadian female photographer. As a photographer and artist who re-located into a culture that promotes visibility I sometimes feel I remain as invisible as the carpet weaver. Just as the creator of the carpet remains hidden in the carpet we walk on, the photographer stands behind the camera that produces photographs of others. As I engage in my narrative beginnings to this study, I keep going back and forth bringing the past into the present. This bringing of the past into the present causes me to question my identity and develop deeper understanding of my voice. In the study I look at carpets as metaphors through which mine and the women carpet weavers' identities are linked.

As I listened to the stories of the carpet weavers in 'Abdol's house', I engaged in a narrative inquiry that involved photography and photo-elicitation thus interpreting my creative identity along with theirs. My experience as a visual artist informs my research because I know that engaging in visual narrative can elicit information from co-participants that may not be apparent in their spoken words. Furthermore, by including both textual narratives and visual narratives, I hope to represent the co-participant's rich experiences and create a more multi-dimensional text than is possible with the use of

textual elements alone.

My narrative inquiry is driven by the central question of identity: the identity of the woman weaving the carpet and my identity embedded in both the carpet as a visual artifact and a woven thread of a culture to which I belong. There are stories woven in the carpet that has been handed down from generation to generation. For the creator of the carpet it has one meaning, for the user of the carpet another, yet the artifact itself links women across space and time. The carpet-weaving family who participated in my study in Iran is a link, a bridge between my identity as an immigrant and an artist and that of the woman carpet weaver's hidden identity as an artist and keeper of a culture within a patriarchal system.

The Research Contribution

This research project contributes to the present literature by giving voice to women carpet weavers in Iran in their roles as artists and preservers of historical and cultural artifacts within a rural family carpet operation setting. Qualitative studies that involve the rural carpet cottage industry in Iran have generally focused on women's unpaid labour in home-based carpet productions and have used the relationship between Iranian patriarchal gender relations and the economic system as the primary tools for explaining women's subordination in the informal Iranian economy (Afshar, 1985; Ghavamshahidi, 1991). Nikkolgh (1991) describes the role of rural Iranian women as producers of carpets and handicrafts as well as co-participants in activities such as agricultural production and animal husbandry. Studies have also focused on child labour (Erlich, 1995; Meo, 2000), the increase of tuberculosis and other health-related problems

in the carpet industry (Ameen et al., 2003; Ghumman, 2004; Thomas, 1992), carpet capitalism and exiled labourers (McGuckin, 1997) in Tibet's carpet industry. Although valuable studies on indigenous rural carpet production have been conducted in Pakistan, Tibet, India, China, Thailand and Turkey, the literature has paid insufficient attention to the nature of rural Iranian carpet-weaving, the social relations among family members, and the role of rural carpet-weaving families in maintaining and preserving traditional carpet-production techniques within an aesthetic, cultural and historical context.

To date, research exploring rural cottage industries has been conducted quantitatively. Not enough is known about the qualitative experiences of individual carpet weavers. The purpose of this research is to explore individuals' experiences in the making of carpets and across the generational span. While other studies have mainly focused on the health issues and the economic exploitation of women and children in the carpet-weaving industry, this study gives voice to rural carpet-weaving women in honor of their contributions to the family economy and as preservers of cultural heritage.

A Theoretical Framework

The Human Ecology theoretical framework places people in relationships within micro and macro interactions and connections that influence their life (Westney, Brabble & Edwards, 1988). This theory helped me understand the interactions among family members in family carpet operations, the family's near environment that is constructed around the carpet loom and around family chores in the home, and the family's social-cultural and natural milieu in everyday life. "Essential to the ecological perspective is its' emphasis on context" (Garbarion, 1984 as cited in Glossop, 1988, p.8). Context is the

hallmark of ecological sensitivities (Glossop, p.5) within which human development is situated and everyday life as a reality is interpreted by individuals and becomes subjectively meaningful to them as a "coherent world" (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p.20). In carpet-producing village settings, usually the women of the family are weavers, and their home is their place of work. Within this family context, the production of carpets occurs, tasks are assigned, obligations are presumed and family decisions are made. At the heart of the family weaving context lies the "aesthetic development of the individual with the application of aesthetic knowledge toward the achievement of an enriched and more satisfying personal and family life" (Van Dommelen, 1968 as cited in Cox-Bishop, 1989, p.18). This aesthetic knowledge, "as families experience life together" (Badir, 1993) within the continua of space and time, not only shape the identity of individuals and the families but it also preserves the culturally situated artifact, the carpet, which captures and allows the transference of knowledge of carpet-weaving in a family context from one generation to the next.

Visual Representation of Four Main Key Areas

Illustration 1.
The Human Ecology framework

Illustration 2.
Material culture

Illustration 1 symbolizes the interconnectedness of the individual within the family and their near environment which is a model for Human Ecology study. *Illustration 2* is a representation of the carpet and the loom.

Illustration 3.
Rural home-based carpet production

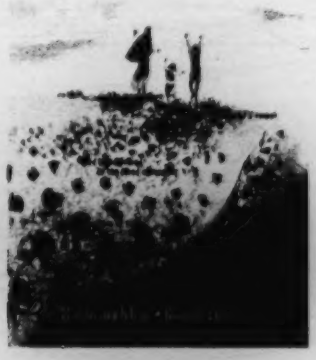


Illustration 4.
Visual and textual narrative inquiry

Illustration 3 is an image by Kollwitz (1981, p.54) whose drawings capture the life of women workers. *Illustration 4* is the cover of a children's story book entitled *Roses in My Carpet* (Khan, 1998) about an Afghani boy who found refuge in weaving roses into his carpet. The four illustrations visually encompass four concepts central to the study: human ecology, material culture, home-based production and the composing of narrative.

CHAPTER TWO

Setting the Scene: Literature Review and Theoretical, Ideological and Methodological Underpinnings

Literature Review

Chapter two begins with an historical, demographic, political and social overview of the country of Iran to establish the narrative setting and familiarize the audience with the temporal and spatial framework where the study took place. I then discuss the literature available on the history of carpet production in Iran, the idea of carpets as spiritual symbols, the nature of home-based work and women as craft producers. I then outline the theoretical, ideological and methodological underpinnings to the approach that guides this study.

Introduction to Iran

Iran is a diverse country consisting of people of many religions and ethnic backgrounds. "Seventy percent of present-day Iranians are native speakers of Indo-European languages. Other spoken languages are Azeri (Oral-Altaic) and Arabic (Semitic). The majority of Iranians are Muslims. Ninety percent belong to the Shi'a branch of Islam, the official state religion, and about 8% belong to the Sunni branch. The remaining 2% are non-Muslim religious minorities mainly Baha'is, Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians" (Wikipedia, 2007). Multiculturalism is the fabric of Iran and there are no unified cultural customs or traditions since every ethnic group has unique cultural codes of conduct. However, there are certain cultural, historical, religious and socio-economic norms and processes such as traditionalism, family structure, women's social and cultural

identity that underlie a shared background of Iranian society, some of which are relevant to my study.

A Brief History of Carpet Production in Iran

Iranian carpets have been traded along the Silk Road from Turkey to Beijing for hundreds of years. During the Safavid era, considered the most innovative and transformational period for carpet art, magnificent masterpieces of carpet were created. The Safavid-era painters who created the designs used by carpet weavers as templates introduced creative and durable motifs such as cypress trees, floral designs, hunting scenes and locations, as well as a variety of marginalia which set off the central motifs.

Today the income generated by the export of carpets is second only to that generated by the export of oil (Iran Chamber of Commerce, 2000). The success of the carpet industry resulted from the popularity of, and demand for, Iranian carpets in international markets and from the expansion of the Iranian urban carpet workshops. European interest in this industry also changed the organization of production. The large Western market revived the carpet industry in terms of interest in the traditional weaving areas while having a negative impact on the division of labor, in particular, on women (Dedeoglu, 2004; O'Brian, 1999; Susilastuti, 1996).

Recently in the West, a particular type of carpet commonly referred to as the "Gabbeh" has become increasingly popular. This is a type of woven wool carpet with either an asymmetrical or symmetrical bold design of no typical pattern. The unique characteristic of this carpet lies in its symbols and figures, which the weaver spontaneously weaves. Since approximately 1980, the Gabbeh has risen in popularity

amongst dealers, collectors, and auction houses, as a highly desirable example of tribal weaving. In the past the carpet was an item of luxury and could be afforded only by the affluent; however, Iranian carpets are no longer found solely in the homes of wealthy Iranians, Europeans, and North Americans because of mass production and global marketing.

Carpet-weaving was an occupation practiced by women and men at home, in village workshops, and in urban workshops. In cities there are home based weaving families who operate the same as in the villages. Orders for carpets are determined through a carpet merchant who assesses the demand for certain regional designs. A middleman then distributes the carpet orders between the co-ops and the weaving families. Village rugs continue to be hand-woven by villagers, most of whom are women and children. Usually all family members or at least the women of the family are weavers, and their home is their place of work. Carpets woven by villagers have more variety of styles than other Iranian carpets because both nomads and the nearby cities have influenced village weaving. When nomads settled in villages they brought with them their traditional styles and techniques. At the same time, many village weavers accept orders from urban rug dealers or choose their patterns according to the demand of the market in nearby cities. This dual influence accounts for the villagers' elaborate and complex motifs woven in the carpets (Afshar, 1985). In addition, village carpets are named for the villages in which they are made. Generally, a specific pattern is associated with a specific region (see *Figure 1*). The carpets are named for villages such as Bijar, Sarouk, Sultanabad and Heriz. Regions such as Kashan, Qom, and Arak are known for quality carpets. The weavers themselves might be from different clans, but a finished rug

bears the name of the village where it was woven. For this reason, carpets from the same village may look very different or have different characteristics, yet they share tribal techniques or color schemes. It is these different characteristics that make carpets authentic and create a market among collectors, dealers, art historians and curators.

The family in the study operates a home-based carpet-weaving operation in the village of Abu Zeyd Abad. On the map in *Figure 1* Abu Zeyd Abad is located between Qom and Kashan.

Figure 1. Map of carpet-weaving locations in Iran, (Rug N Rug, 2007).

Iranian Carpets as Symbols of Poetical Divine

The art of carpet-weaving in Iran is deeply connected with the culture and the customs of the people of this land and reflects their intuitive feelings. Samvat (2004), a Zoroastrian practitioner writing about Persian (Iranian) carpets for www.farhangiran.com [*farhang* means culture] writes,

> There lies a great mystery within the forms in Persian carpets... To understand the essence of the forms' mystery and the meaning, one needs to understand the knowledge, tradition and religious beliefs that have influenced the master craftsmen of Persian carpets over the ages...
>
> According to theosophical studies and the ancient mystical schools, as we, being the human race, take steps with purpose to attain spiritual awareness, we develop a new identity... Throughout history, there have been individuals who have represented such awareness. Our original culture, language, music and rituals, especially those of the Zoroastrians, were designed and developed over years within their forms to stimulate religious experience and spirituality within the heart of individuals. Such Divine perception and experience were transformed and communicated into the form of poetry, to stimulate aid to and lift the spirit of Man.
>
> It was not until after the twelfth century that esoteric ideas were introduced into Persian carpets. They had their great influence in early sixteenth century during the Safavid era in Iran and under the Ottomans in Turkey, through such poets of the time as Sadi, Hafez, Rumi, Shams-Tabrizi, and many more. Some of these designs find their meaning in doctrines of esoteric and mystical branches of the Islam religion called Sufism. As the influence of Sufism spread, so did its influence on art and its adaptation within the design of Persian carpets. Persian poets compare their poems to that of the weaver, for a poet weaves worlds, interlocking them for rhythm and rhyme.
>
> Sufi poets believed that thoughts are things, and the nature of thought gives rise to the form. The quality of the thought determines the colour. They used forms, colours and multiple meanings to create a three-dimensional concept to lead the observer to the underlying unity of the art, which is nothing but the reflection of the spirit in the world of matter. Since the nature of spirit is love, these designs became a means of conveying their message for their search of Divine love...

Samvat suggests three principles to consider when looking at carpet design: the principle of continuous design, the principle of multiple meaning, and the principle of depth perception. He writes that "...the geometrical designs are the reflection of the stages of

awareness humans achieve as they journey toward unity with God" (Samvat, 2004). He likens the outer edges of the designs to the conscious mind and the inner design to the subconscious mind. He notes that images of gardens, Paradise, animals and flowers woven in the carpets had meanings that were associated with Persian poetry and a message of divine love in the Sufi doctrines and mysteries. These poems are written in symbolic language, the language of the soul. This is the same language as our dreams. Therefore, poetry and in its reflection of poetry, woven carpets become a means of communication between the man and his soul. The motifs appear in carpets as visual symbols of Sufism's seven levels and states of being of the soul or mind. For example, the level of self-mastery is represented by the tree of life design, and the image of the guardians of each level such as the head of a man, body of a bull, wings of an eagle and legs of a lion which are often found woven into rugs. In conclusion Samvat states:

> There is something within the rugs that draws us; there is something within the rugs that speaks to us and it may not be the same for everyone. Individuals are drawn to different types, designs and colour of rugs, based on their present state of conscious awareness.

In this study, the rural carpet-weaving family incorporates images and motifs from their heritage and regional culture into the carpet: images of the divine as reflections of the human connection between individuals and their souls. The completed carpets are transferred to the bazaar merchants who understand the significance of the symbolic language. As the carpets travel further and further away from the region, the knowledge of the symbolism is less likely to be understood when they leave the country. The new owners are attracted to their beauty but have no knowledge of the significance of the motifs transferred to them.

The Nature of Home-based Work

Historically, home-based work in Iran was supplementary to the household income; now it tends to be a main source of household income. Because agriculture can no longer absorb as many workers as it could even a decade ago, and in the absence of factory labor, home-based work provides a source of income for a low-skilled and poor rural population. Home-based work is unsteady and exploitative. However, it serves as a fallback occupation for those who are unemployed or who have irregular jobs. Without income from home-based employment, many families would face severe economic hardships (Susilastuti, 1996, p.139).

In terms of carpet-weaving, home-based work is divided into two systems: the "putting-out" system and "independent" system. Under the putting-out system, there are two types of subcontracts: horizontal and vertical. Under horizontal subcontracts the merchant and the craft producers agree to a production plan without the merchant providing the raw material, whereas in vertical subcontracts the merchant provides the raw material to the workers at home. Workers in the putting-out system earn their wages under contract by piece rate with payments coming after the work is complete.

In the independent system, families produce carpets through their own investments and family labor. These weavers are under neither contracts nor subcontracts and most of the weavers own their tools, looms, and material. Ghvamshahidi (1991) describes workers under the independent village setting stating that some weavers also work at services such as housecleaning and laundry, or might work in the public bath or at other manual labor to help augment the family income (p.121).

The review of the literature showed that home-based craft production in

developing countries with similar characteristics reflects a Catch-22 of Third World labor practices in which craft production is a necessary means of income generation while at the same time it advances exploitation. People who are engaged in home-based enterprises have no other choice than to accept their situation, which is mainly due to their socio-economic conditions. Even in situations where craft production promotes producer identity and the satisfaction of creating cultural and traditional artifacts, many disadvantages relating to exploitation, gender division of labor and health still exist. Although blurred boundaries exist, in the following discussion I review some of the advantages and disadvantages for women in rural carpet-making cottage industries.

Women in Cottage Industries

Starting from my intent to design a study exploring women's roles in, and attitudes toward, rural home-based carpet production and its cultural implications, I will discuss a number of related issues.

Women are the primary producers of carpets in Iranian rural home-based carpet-weaving. Recently, in some areas, men have been trained to take a role in this traditional craft, but it is more likely that men will be found in the urban workshops. Carpets are not only an economic mainstay but are also, and perhaps more importantly, the repository for a tradition of heritage, story and artistry handed down through generations of women. Although women are the primary producers and the household is the women's domain, the household is seen not only by the culture, but by the women themselves as the property and sphere of influence of men. It is ironic that, in the present study, I refer to the carpet-making women as belonging to 'Abdol's house'.

In order to place the women's work in context, I will first discuss the nature of the family household production. Then I review literature that discusses the advantages of the family household production to women: 1) women's contribution to the household and national economy; 2) the role of women as bearers of traditional and cultural artifacts; 3) how craft production provides women identity and status; and 4) the flexibility of women's work.

Of the disadvantages of household production, I review literature related to: 1) the invisibility of women contribution; 2) the impact of globalization on regional designs and the exploitation of women; 3) the influences of Islamic and other seclusion laws that put restrictions on the social freedom of women both within public and private spaces; 4) health problems and the lack of financial security. I also explore literature related to ways in which women could exert greater control over household production for pay.

The nature of family household production.

Women have always had a major economic role in the household. Nikkolgh (1991) notes that in ancient times, rural women in Iran played significant economic roles in the household by participating in various activities including food-gathering, animal husbandry, pottery-making, harvesting, and producing a variety of handicrafts for personal use and as supplements to the family income (pp.7-8). Susilastuti (1996) believes that historically, home-based work was supplementary, yet now it tends to be a household's main source of income (p. 129).

Issues related to women's contributions to the household and national economy.

The income of women is crucial for the basic survival of low-income families in many Third World countries. Women from low-income families who do not have access to the formal job market often use their domestic spaces for income generation (Shihabuddin, 2003, p.321-322). Chant (1997 as cited in Shihabuddin) points out home-based jobs are crucial sources of income for women. Women play a major role in organizing the home for income generation as well as the daily life of family members (p.322). Shihabuddin points to a number of studies conducted by scholars (Gulati, 1990; Huq-Hussain, 1996; Sinai, 1998; Raj and Mitra, 1990), emphasizing the key role of women as the providers of economic activities without which the household would perish. Shihabuddin notes, the home becomes a container of human life and an essential shelter for those life-sustaining activities (p. 322).

Afshar (1985), Ghvamshahidi (1995) and Nikkolgh (1991) explored Iranian rural carpet-weaving production and the role of women, and women's contribution to the household and national economy. According to the findings of these scholars, many women are dependent on weaving for their livelihood. For other women, such labor generates extra cash for the support of their families. The authors argue that home-based carpet-weaving is labor-intensive work done mostly by women from low-income classes in rural and undeveloped urban areas in Iran. These women are dependent on income from weaving to support themselves and their families. The authors also point out that cultural mores act to keep women in their culturally defined place. They are required to stay in the home and uphold the requirement of gender ideology which advocates the traditional division of labor, requiring men to work outside while women take care of

their family and home. They further add that the women of the lower economic level take a much more active part in the overall production of handicrafts such as embroidery, sewing, spinning and weaving carpets to generate income for the family. Dedeoglu (2004) explores the garment ateliers in Istanbul and the importance of women's participation in garment production as a source of income. He notes that women are not only a cheap labor source for these ateliers, they also help "to mediate the familial relations—including social networks of family, kinship, and neighborhood—upon which the survival of ateliers in the very volatile market of the garment industry depends" (p.1).

Women as bearers of traditional and cultural artifacts.

Women not only contribute to the household and national economy in making their crafts, they are also the bearers of heritage. In addition, by making their crafts, women gain a sense of identity and pride. In a study focused on the silk weavers of Kyoto, Hareven (2002) examines Nishijin women's contributions to making one of the cultural and traditional *Obi* (the sash worn over *Kimono*). Behind the elegant *Nishijin Obi* "there lies a complex history of human, family, and community relationships among the weavers, manufacturers, and other craftspeople" (p.2). Hareven describes the strong attachment these weavers have to their work and to the high quality and fame of their products. She further notes that the tradition of family-based craftsmanship and industry has been embedded in the community for centuries and the production of this textile has become a way of life and a central mark of Nishijin's identity (p.9). Harevan quotes a weaver, "I grew up with the weaving sounds" (p.51). The same individual also commented, "Make sure to return to Kyoto, because you are taking part of our lives with

you" (p.9). Creighton (2001) draws upon Japanese craft as invoking a sense of nostalgia, particularly a sense of longing for the pre-industrial past that is a protest against urbanization and industrialization (p.5). In modern Japan, women of the upper class are attending classes to learn how to weave *Obi*; likewise in Iran, affluent women are taking training in how to weave carpets, nostalgically reclaiming as a leisure activity an art central to women's gender roles in earlier eras. This engagement of the affluent, cosmopolitan Iranian women as textile artists forms a sharp contrast with the women carpet weavers in rural Iranian families, where finances rather than art is the central feature.

Craft production provides women with identity and status.

Frater (2002) explores the Indian Rabari people's pride in their embroidery of doorway hangings (*toran*), creations that reflect a personal expression of community, status within the community and the need to maintain their identity and culture (pp.156-158). Ghvamshahidi (1991) argues that "Learning to weave is part of the village women's life" in Iran (p.142). It is considered an art occupying the leisure time of the women at home. Embodied in this statement is the idea that art encourages girls to learn weaving by enticing them to think of it as art and leisure activity instead of an essential survival skill. She further states that the majority of women do not regard weaving as formal employment. The weavers described the beauty of their product, recognizing the aesthetic value of the carpets as a craft satisfying the desire to create goods more permanent than the results of mundane daily activities (p.118).

In cultures with strong religious influences, home-based work is considered a sign

of prestige and status, particularly in places where religious codes inhibit women from seeking jobs outside their private space and limit their social relationships within the larger society. Larson (1991) explores this issue by noting that there is a positive value of working at home in the Egyptian village of Beni Suef. He argues that craft work, since it is usually done within the context of a family business, is seen not so much as a profession or as work but simply as an extension of one's family or household responsibilities. In cultural terms, the role of a housewife who does not have to work outside the home generally carries high prestige in rural Beni Suef, as it does in the rest of Egyptian society. He goes on to state that much of the work that a woman does as part of her domestic duties is not considered work, rather it is considered a sign of a woman's skill as a good domestic manager. Being a housewife implies that the family has high enough financial status that a wife's employment for monetary return is unnecessary (pp.47-49).

Flexibility of women's work.

In the literature reviewed, one of the advantages to women in home-based operations is their sense of flexibility in their work within their household. Being at home enables them to do their work along with other household duties at their leisure and as an extension of their role in the family. Yet, some women state that being able to do other family chores at home interfere with their craft making and they would prefer working in the urban workshops. Contrary to the perceptions of factory work as a form of exploitation, some women weavers preferred the factory because it gave women status since they were recognized and paid as individual workers. Also, the factories offer an

opportunity for socialization. Factory workers, however, do not preserve the tradition and culture the same as passing the knowledge from one generation to another which is a valuable and important aspect of production of the home-based craft.

The invisibility of women as workers and of women's work.

Women's work remains invisible, which continues to be an obstacle in gaining an understanding of their economic roles in the household and in society. Bhatty (1987) states that one reason for this is that the definition of 'work' given by economists and census commissioners who do not include women who work at home without recognition or payment. Another reason for the non-recognition of women's economic contributions has been neglect by researchers of the household economy and the unorganized sector, in which women play an overwhelming role. Bhatty (1987) argues that Beedi making (cigarette rolling) is one such industry which is spread all over India, and employs mostly women and children. Beedi making has not succeeded in attracting the attention of the economists, administrators and policy makers to any significant extent. Yet, it is an industry which feeds millions of rural and urban poor (p.35). Bhatty points out home-based workers are invisible to society because they work within their homes and do not appear in official statistics (p.22). Perhaps the nineteenth-century Dutch colonial census takers cited by Susilastuti (1996) had no way to classify the home-based work of women. Hareven (2002) writes that although women have a major role in the household economy, their work has remained invisible and unrecognized by policy makers and national census takers (p.84).

Afshar (1985) reflects on women's work as invisible and states that the apparent

invisibility of women's worth, as well as their work, is widespread and persistent on the whole. Women's work has been severely devalued by a "universal ideological framework" that regards them as inferior labourers (p. x). Part of the problem also arises from the fact that women do not consider themselves the main economic providers of the household in spite of the fact that they might work an equal amount or even more in relation to their male partners. Many women belittle their economic contribution to the household by stating that their income is "just enough to buy salt" or by saying "it's true that both I and my husband work. But he is the breadwinner. His main activity is sewing. I, on the other hand, do not only sew. I also have to cook, take care of the children, and do other chores. As a result, my husband does more work than I do" (as cited in Susilastuti, 1996, p. 134). Because this woman interrupted sewing for reproductive household labor, she did not consider her sewing to be as important as her husband's sewing. Mohamad (1996) states that the Malay handloom industry is largely propped up by a pool of invisible workers that work within the confines of their homes. She adds that a majority of them are women who do not show up in any category of the officially recognized labor force (p.181). Hareven (2002) notes even highly skilled women weavers in Nishijin viewed their weaving as supplemental to their husbands' work, and perceived little distinction between their weaving and their overall contributions to the family through child rearing and housework (p.81).

Mies (1980 as cited in Beneria, 1982) raises some fundamental questions about the economic and social foundations of the inequality between men and women. She points out that biological determinism is the deepest-rooted obstacle to the analysis of the causes of women's oppression. Women themselves "find it difficult to establish that the unequal,

hierarchical and exploitative relationship between sexes is caused by social—that is, historical—factors" (p.xvii). Mies argues that the search for the origins of women's oppression should include the analysis of how "history in the making" has affected women and placed them in a subordinate position throughout history. She goes on to say that we should no longer look at the sexual division of labor as a problem related to the family, but as a structural problem of a whole society. (p.xviii)

Mies's study includes an empirical analysis of "history in the making." Mies refers to women lacemakers in Narsapur (in Andhra Pradesh, India), engaged in a putting-out industry affecting 200,000 women. The proceeds from handmade lace and lace products, sold in the national and the international markets, have been increasing rapidly since 1970; expansion of this home-based industry, Mies argues, has led to a class differentiation within local communities as well as to a greater polarization and differentiation between men's and women's tasks.

Globalization's exploitation of women and impact on regional designs.

With global reorganization and the growing market economy there has been an increased tendency of multinationals to relocate their businesses in the Third World, where there is an abundance of cheap labor. Home-based industries in developing countries are absorbing a significant portion of the labor force in rural areas and more and more landless households in the Third World rely on nonagricultural employment in a growing informal rural sector (Susilastuti, 1996, p.8). Also in many developing countries, through free trade zones and often unprotected labor laws, foreign firms utilize the most vulnerable sectors of the workforce - immigrants and women - associated with the

"flexibility" of labor markets and also are the main recipients of casual, instable, and insecure jobs (Dedeoglu, 2004, p.2). Fluctuations in market demand and severe competition from larger firms lead entrepreneurs to rely exclusively on home-based workers since "employing in-workers causes too many hassles" such as monitoring their hours, providing space to work and contending with union regulations (Susilastuti, 1996, p.130). One of the characteristics of this trend is reliance on piecework, which results in competition and further lowering of already low prices. Sometimes workers absorb some of the production costs due to redoes either under their bosses' instruction or because they recognize unintentional damage of a product which, if sold, might ruin the workers' reputations. O'Brian (1999) explores the impact of the market economy in the production of crafts in Mexico and describes the dependency of the rural proletariat on a cash economy. He states this pattern of craft production may be understood best as the response of poor, rural landless farmers to Mexico's are increasingly incorporated into the larger capitalist system (p.31).

The increasing use of female piecework labor in home-based production is a reflection of the continuing internationalism in craft production. Today's global market targets women using their domestic spaces within the sub-contracting system as cheap labor. In Dhaka's *bustees*, similar processes were observed by Shihabuddin (2003, p.321). Ghvamshahidi (1996) describes the mode of recruiting women to carpet-weaving as a phenomenon that relates to gender ideology and capitalism, with a strong emphasis on the sexual division of labor as women do the work at home and men handle the transactions outside the home (p.113). These arguments, among many others, indicate the direct impact of globalization on the division of labor. Another problem that arises from

globalization is the influence of commodification of craft production. Commodification diminishes cultural heritage and identity, a traditionally central aspect of home craft production which was originally an individual artistic endeavor, and affects the living spaces of home-based workers.

Mohlam (1999) describes the issue of identity through artistry or artisanship, stating that the craft-as-culture approach carries an underlying assumption that people make crafts, but crafts also make people. Motifs and designs change when the crafts are produced for the international market demands (McGuckin, 1997, p.293). Mohlam states that craft production is an identity-shaping process linked to ethnic and gender categories, status rankings, and social class distinctions. As the status of a craft object changes due to commercialization, people's identities and status are also subject to change (p.114). Mohlam indicates that as women's crafts become detached from holistic and local cultures, women themselves become degraded and lose their status in their communities. In this context, Frater (2000) states that the styles and motifs of Indian embroidery and dress of Rabari subgroups have changed within the context of changing global trends (p.159).

Influences of Islamic and seclusion laws on women.

Seclusion codes are also assumed to create a sexual space that limits women's activities outside the home and within certain roles. According to Baud (1987) among the Beedi workers of India, about 86 per cent of the women are Muslims, and 14 percent are Hindus (p.79). The households to which these women belong have a very strong seclusion ethic, which makes it impossible for women to take on income generating work

outside the home. Brouwer (1987) explores another dimension of ritualistic and seclusion influences on the traditional division of labor between sexes in south Indian crafts and conceptualizes the problems that inhibit women from fully participating in certain craft production. He notes that within the Karnataka community, men and women are classified as right and left castes within which rights and responsibilities are assigned. Such division of labor places women's function in the liminality of territory created by rites of passage where women are trapped by social or sexual status (p.145). Brouwer also points to another cultural idea, which makes women liable to a temporal and spatial movement, the prohibition against craftswomen using certain tools, such as the weaving loom, during their *menses* (p.148). Similarly, Weiss (1996) explores the effect of Islamic codes and sexual space on women's work in the walled city of Lahore. He describes a cultural vision that presents women as needing protection from the outside world. Here, as Weiss notes, women live under the traditional constraints associated with *Purdah*, which necessitates the separation of women from the activities of men. The design of sexual space within the walls of the old city physically encloses women within the walls of their homes for most of their lives (p.83). Where women are physically separate from access to the cash economy and need to rely on men as intermediaries, their engagement in petty commodity production may, in fact, exacerbates their subordination (Afshar, 1985, p.x).

Health problems.

Many female home-based laborers work within the limited space of their houses, which crowds their own work as well as the work of other family members. As well, health issues are of major concern for these women who spend long hours of work in poor

environments. Working conditions in rural homes are harsher than in urban areas. Most rural houses have no electricity, and weavers' houses are damp, dark, and cramped. In Third World countries, the average working life cycle of a highly skilled weaver is estimated at thirteen years because some weavers lose their eyesight, in part due to improper lighting. Some weavers suffer from physical ailments exacerbated by the nature of their work (Ghvamshahidi, 1996, p.123). Many pregnant women have spontaneous abortions and stillbirths. Young weavers often develop abnormalities of the spinal cord, deformed arms and legs, and bone disease. (p.123). Susilastuti (1996) notes that, in an attempt to cut electricity bills, many placed their sewing machines in front of open windows and waited until absolute darkness before turning on electric lights, resulting in deterioration of their vision. Eighty-seven percent of the Nishijin wives surveyed reported health problems, which doctors named "the Nishijin syndrome." The symptoms included backache, numb and swollen legs, arthritis, eye-fatigue, nearsightedness, constipation, anemia, nettle rash, stiff shoulders, headaches and fatigue in the mornings. As the women advanced in age, these diseases and fatigue became chronic and the women suffered from rheumatism (p.131). In addition, Nishijin women had a high rate of miscarriage attributed to the fact that they usually continued to weave until the day before giving birth (Hareven, 2002, p.82).

Claiming control.

In terms of ways in which women can exert greater control over their household production for pay, policy makers and planners must acknowledge the importance of home-based work as their main livelihood and regulate wages or contracts depending

upon the quality and amount of time spent on the craft. For instance, in Dhaka's *bustees*, a number of non-government organizations have introduced training programs and micro credit especially for women to help them use their domestic spaces for income generation (Shihabuddin, 2003, p.321), Other such schemes are being instituted in many Third World communities. In this way, women do not need to depend on the middleman for their wages. Their wages can then be distributed throughout the production period or a system of alternative sources of credit can be created so that in times of crisis women do not have to go into debt or ask for an advance in pay which results in a later period of work without pay. These co-operative institutions can also provide daily necessities such as thread, rice and cooking oil. These measures enable workers to reduce their indebtedness to local traders.

Relating the literature to the present research.

The role of women in home-based industries worldwide has been discussed from many perspectives. Drawing perspectives to the household level - a micro perspective - was one of the tasks of my research. The present study gives voice to the women of one home-based Iranian carpet-weaving family in order to show their lives and to allow them to represent their lives through conversations and photographs. In this way the commentary on, discussion of, and conclusions about the impact of weaving on their lives will be made, not by me as an outsider applying theories, but in a collaborative relationship with the women.

Theoretical and Ideological Underpinnings

In this section, I examine the theoretical underpinnings of this research project by looking at three areas: 1) the human ecology view of the family in micro-and macro-settings; 2) material culture and the relationship of object to meaning, and 3) how arts-based research builds on the assumption that works of art are messages conveying facts, thoughts, and feelings.

The Human Ecology View of the Family System

Valuable to my research is the human ecological framework represented by Steiner (1995) as an evolutionary dimension known as a 'human ecological onion' that serves to familiarize us with the historical past and its transformation into the present (p.35). Anderson (1990 as cited in Steiner, 1995) notes: "All cultures and societies obtain their coherence and their identity through the reminiscence of their ancestors" (p.43). Women weaving carpets in their rural village homes in Iran are the repository of personal and cultural stories and traditions, as well as the producers of economic commodities. By identifying the history and the way the women understand their craft and their products, I am able to present an authentic account of their storied experiences rooted in a material culture approach.

Human ecology is the study of humans as both biological organisms and social beings, in interaction with their near environments, both the social environment and the human-constructed physical or material one. Within this framework, the family is considered to be an energy transformation system that is interdependent with its natural physical-biological, human-built, and social-cultural milieus. The emphasis is on the

creation, use, and management of resources for creative adaptation, human development, and sustainability of environments (Bubolz, & Sontag, 1993, p.419) (see *Figure 2*, p. 32). This theory guided my research and supported my understanding of the interactions among family members in family carpet operations, the family's near environment that is constructed around the carpet loom and around family chores in the home, and the family's social-cultural and natural environments in everyday life (Westney, Brabble & Edwards, 1988).

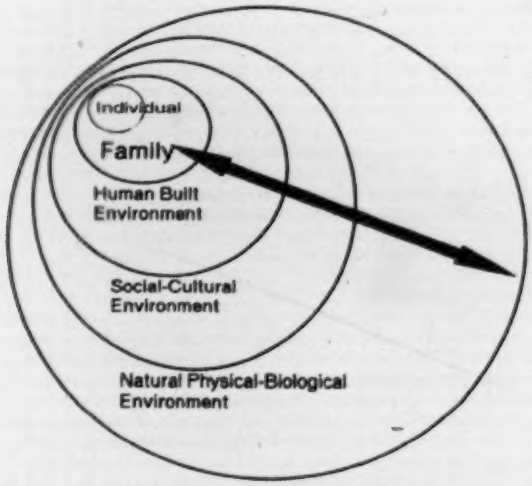


Figure 2. The family ecosystem.

Source: adapted from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) 'onion rings'

"Essential to the ecological perspective is its emphasis on context"(Garbario, 1984 as cited in Glossop, 1988, p.8). Other advocates of the ecological perspective emphasize context as the hallmark of their ecological sensitivities (Glossop, p.5). The context or the environment within which human development is situated is a necessary dimension of ecological research. Berger & Luckman (1966) submit everyday life as a reality that is interpreted by individuals and is subjectively meaningful to them as a "coherent world."

They go on to say that it is a world that originates the individual's thoughts and actions (pp.19-20). In carpet-producing village settings, usually all family members or the women of the family are weavers, and their home is their place of work. Within this family context, the production of carpets occurs, tasks are assigned, obligations are presumed and family decisions are made. At the heart of this family weaving context lies the "aesthetic development of the individual with the application of aesthetic knowledge toward the achievement of an enriched and more satisfying personal and family life." (Cox-Bishop, 1989, p.18). This aesthetic knowledge, "as families experience life together" (Badir, 1993) within the continua of space and time, not only shapes the identity of individuals but also preserves the culturally-situated artifact, the carpet, by transferring the knowledge from one generation to the next. Within families, and over generations of families, a particular culture is formed.

Human ecology, according to Westney, et al. (1988), is an interdisciplinary applied field with a holistic approach to studying individuals and families in their social-cultural environment and through material culture as human-built environment. It seeks to identify the forces that enhance human development, actualize human potential, optimize human functioning, and improve the condition and quality of the lives of people (Bubolz, 1995). Further, within this ecology, families interact with multiple environments guided by physical and biological laws of nature (p.426).

Bubolz & Sontag (1993) consider the feminist perspective to be an underlying assumption of human ecology. This assumption is supported by the literature regarding rural carpet-weaving, which is presented within a gender ideology context, including women's informal work, patriarchy and underpaid work. In many ways these past studies

have focused on carpet-weaving as a site of oppression in the lives of these women. No studies yet exists which reflects on and give voice to the women as makers of traditional artifacts within an aesthetic context in the milieu of household economics.

Material Culture: Meaning and Object, Story and Image

Material culture studies begin with the proposition that the world of objects and images constitute a broad body of evidence that can be used to describe relationships between people and the world they inhabit. A material culture approach to artifacts, which begins with a basic understanding of everyday objects and images, identifies the stories the objects and images seem best suited to tell. The immediate physical environment implies the artifacts, implements, raw materials, surroundings and processes involved in the daily round of regular home life have complex narratives ingrained in them. The narratives embedded in the relationship between people and their objects and images is one of the underlying ideas central to my art and research. Individual narratives reflect their development of their sense of self and identity and contain interactions with other individuals and objects in their near environments.

Placed in the context of the history and economics of the carpet-weaving tradition in Iran, the "public and private space" where I discovered stories existed within the dynamic tension of the relationship between the personal meaning of carpet in defining identity and culture and the economic meaning of carpet within the global marketplace. At the personal end of the spectrum are stories of identity and home, history and community, exile and displacement (mine and the weavers'); communication; cultural and traditional values, and the carpets as narrative artifacts. The story transforms as the carpet enters

community space where carpets act as a source of prestige and as collateral for the young women carpet weavers' dowries. The story of carpets as understood by the consumer is a completely different narrative conditioned by the romanticism of imperialism. The global marketplace which extends its reach into the village economy defines carpets as sources of income, and the prestige value of village-made carpet which is seen as "authentic" in the West.

"Material culture is the study through artifacts of the beliefs—values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions—of a particular community or society at a given time" (Prown, 1982, p.1). Glassie (1999) describes material culture as "culture made material" through which human thought and action can be explored (p.41). The term *material culture* thus refers to the subject matter of the study, *material*, and to the understanding of *culture* (Prown, p.2). Therefore, the function of an object is culture-specific, and "the artifact itself is the product of a particular historical context—of particular makers using particular tools in a particular place at a particular time" (Kingery, 1995, p.15).

Thus just as the evolution of life on earth can be determined by fossils, the social organization and progress of a particular people or nation can be read from their material culture (Buchli, 2002). Objects intimately connected with the notion of progress of a nation and material culture, as it was conceived in the nineteenth century, are signifiers of universal progress and modernity (p.4). The rise of material culture had a direct affinity with the rise of consumerism (Belk, 2001, cited in Buchli, 2002, p.6) during which the department store emerged and was a venue for displaying the materials of culture. These influences were the primary means by which other societies in distant time and space were studied (p.12).

It was not until later that the study of cultural objects as a 'primary text' did not seem to be sufficient to learn about other cultures without the context. Boas (1907), Malinowski (1915), and Mead (1925) among other anthropologists sought to understand societies directly through participant observation over long periods of time to determine how societies function as social systems and what the social structure behind the material culture was (cited in Buchli, 2002, p.7). With rapid social change and industrialization in Europe, as well as a gradual disappearance of rural agrarian societies, artifacts were studied from different perspectives. Such perspectives included concern with loss rather than consumption because the traditional agrarian society was vanishing and so did their material of culture (Buchli, 2002, p.9). Buchli highlights perspectives such as the role of objects in symbolic systems, the rise of interest in semiotics and structuralism within structural Marxism in United States (Glassie, 1975, Deetz, 1977 as cited in Buchli, 2002) and feminist perspectives regarding analysis of the material culture (p.11). Buchli argues that prior to the acceptance of the feminist perspective the study of artifacts had been viewed with a masculine bias (a bias which relegated women to the status of consumers, while men were the ones 'possessing' material culture) (p.11). This study explores the role of women as producers of carpet, not consumers of carpet.

Present understanding of material culture is the result of a long process of influences from liberal Enlightenment era's notions of universality through the traditions of the nineteenth century, colonial expansionism, industrialization and the birth of consumerism to post-modern, post colonial globalization. Rather than an artifact of imperialism, material culture now potentially "functions as a means of resistance against globalization" (Rowlands, 1983 as cited in Buchli, p.17), despite the risk of a local

industry undertaking the kitsch production of manufactured artifacts for a tourist market.

In this study, I draw upon several material culture concepts including: 1) person-object relations and meaning making; 2) objects as narratives; 3) identity through possession; 4) global commodities and local identities; and 5) the weaver as creator.

Glassie on Material Culture and Carpet-weaving: A Central Work

Glassie, in *Material Culture* (1999), provides one of the most important and poetic analyses of a carpet-weaving family found in the literature. Glassie (p.41) writes that men and women make things and transfer themselves so completely into their work that, when completed, the work is filled with human spirit. Armstrong (1981 as cited in Glassie, 1999) argues, we encounter objects "as affecting presences—as subjects, not objects". (p.42). Glassie notes that the history of people and their culture is preserved in unwritten artifacts they produce (p.44), and he argues that, just like a story, an artifact can be considered a text through which meaning is derived. He further adds that a story belongs to temporal experience, which moves in one direction and accumulates associations sequentially, whereas an artifact belongs to spatial experience unfolding in all directions at once (p.47). As a text and a fragment of the spatial and temporal whole (p.63), every object's narrative can be broken down and read as parts belonging to a whole composition.

Material culture acts in the same way as language, where one word has a richer meaning when put into a context of other words. A lone motif on a carpet might not mean anything, but rather the assembly of motifs on the rug creates the narrative (p.47). As the text is located within contexts, associations assemble and multiply, and the reading

becomes rich as the artifact swells with meaning (p.48). Glassie further points out that to explore the contextual variety in an artifact, one needs to envision contexts as a series of categories in the context of creation, communication and consumption (p.48)

In weaving a carpet, when the weaver places on the warp one fuzzy, colored knot that will join thousands of others to make a design that she holds only in her mind, "[t] he instant in which she translates herself into wool, when thought becomes material, is central, fundamental, and it gathers a host of associations that fuse in the act of creations" (Glassie, 1999, p.51). The associations have a vertical social dimension learned by the weaver from her mother when she was a child, whom she honors as her teacher. "Social associations have a horizontal dimension. The weaver works as one in the sisterhood of weavers in the village" (p.51). As she continues the act of creation by tying the knots that occupy time, "it reaches at once backward and forward, becoming historical" (p.52). Reaching backward, the weaver's act collects the whole of her biography. "Her carpet's harmonious coloring remembers an early moment when she crawled around the loom and played with the scraps of wool from which she extracted a palette of hues: three reds, two blues, gold and white. The carpet's technique remembers her learning and her mother" (p.52).

"Through the particulars of her biography, the life of a young woman in an agricultural village assembles cultural history, and then history swings forward as she imagines the future" (Glassie, 1999, p.53). The finished carpet means many things to the young girl. "The act of creation bundles up distinct sets of relations within each of which the object gathers significance: there is the context of concentration...of learning...of teaching...of co-operation...of technology...of memory...of hope... It is here in the

multiple contexts of creation that meaning begins" (p.54). Glassie (1999) further states that within the second context, that of communication, "the storyteller composes and presents the tale while communicating, transferring the story directly to another whose presence conditions creation." All objects exist in context, but contexts differ in their ability to help us understand the artifact at question" (p.59).

In some contexts, artifacts have temporal and spatial meaning belonging to someone else and in other contexts we might find our own reflection of our experience in it (p.59). Additionally, in the context of consumption, Glassie looks at a number of stages including assimilation, wherein objects take on a different meaning when removed from the original context and placed in another. Old meanings are replaced by new ones (pp.59-60). Another kind of context is conceptual, in which the object exists among the sets of association that constitute their creators' and users' minds. Glassie calls this the cultural context, because it holds the meanings shared by the people who created it and those who put it to use (p.60). Finally removed from its originating environment, and "out of conceptual context, the object remains in some physical context, visible among other things (p.61).

This complex of contexts and ways of thinking about them applies to the carpets made in 'Abdol's house'. Carpets embedded with tradition and cultural meanings are removed and sent to the bazaar, where they become commodities and exports. Even though the carpet moves to another location it always holds within them the contexts that changes from symbols of memory, imagination and hope to symbols of status, artistry and consumption.

Objects as Narrative

Objects have their own biography and meaning, embedded in culture and tradition. A number of articles by writers who examined the place of objects of material culture as narratives were reviewed. Kopytoff (1986) states that from the perspective of an economist, commodities simply *are*, an item with use value that also has exchange value, whereas from a cultural perspective, the production of commodities is a cultural process endowed with culturally specific meanings (p.64). Through the process of culture, an object is given a biography. Anthropologists often stressed that "what is significant about the adoption of alien objects—as of alien ideas—is not the fact that they are adopted, but the way they are culturally redefined and put to use" (Kopytoff, p.67). Campbell (1996) states that the objects people purchase carry symbolic significance and he suggests that consumers have awareness in making their purchase decisions. He notes that such 'meaningfulness' is not really biographical in origin but rather it relates to a communally shared system of meanings (p.103).

"Possessions play a role in creating, maintaining, and preserving the identity of individuals"(Solomon, 1983 as cited in Gentry, Baker & Draft, 1995, p.413). Over time, individuals develop a set of ideas they believe represent the self-identity that they want to project (Hirschman, 1980 as cited in Gentry et al.), as these material possessions are a part of one's identity (Ball & Tasaki, 1992; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1981, as cited in Gentry et al,, p.413). Supporting the idea that possessions may serve as a source of comfort, McCracken (1988, cited in Gentry et al., p.415) suggests that we "displace our hopes and ideals into possessions and places of the past or future." Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981 as cited in Gentry, p.413) point out, "things tell us who we are, not in words

but by embodying our intentions."

McCracken (1988) writes, "Consumer goods are bridges to hopes and ideals...We use them to recover the displaced cultural meaning that has deliberately been removed from the daily life of a community and relocated in a distant cultural domain" (p.104). McCracken also notes that one of the roles of consumer goods in the recovery of displaced meaning is that objects carry meaning and serve as a nonlinguistic medium for communication (p.105). For example, Jarman (1998) explores the importance of fabric and its use in decorative banners, its history as social objects used by the Ulster Protestants "from manufacture through to collective identity" (p.121). The banners have become a visible material of the Orange tradition that signifies the historical and traditional practices of Protestants (p.121). Jarman argues that the visual display of the banners as material culture has been central to the expression of the Ulster Protestant sense of collective identity (pp. 121-122). He also discusses the economic relationship of linen and its significance as a symbolic medium of Britishness over the course of the time. He notes that "over a period of 150 years linen lost its central economic status in the Northern Irish economy, but the symbolic displays of Britishness were still expressed through the medium of cloth; now transformed into silk and became the embodiment of tradition" (p.121). Thus the silk banner is now both a traditional artifact and bearer of traditional meanings (p.122).

Indonesia and Africa also have used cloth as symbols of status, wealth and as a means of gift giving. Norris (2000) explored the materiality of objects in the processes of self-making and personhood that is apparent in the act of divestment due to the intimate connection between clothing and the body. He notes that cloth is an important element of

gift giving in India, through which social networking is created (p.59). The process of gift-giving cloth includes handing on treasured pieces to family members and servants, sometimes bartering them for new stainless steel pots, or burning them for their silver and gold content (p.60). The act of sacrifice and destruction of such intimate objects is the necessary prerequisite for the renewal of self within a network of person-object relations (p.60). "A woman's wardrobe can be understood as a container of such cloth relations" (p.61), that represents interactions with others in different moments of time and space. Norris points out that the shedding of clothing through recycling amongst family members is reminiscent of what Gell (1998 as cited in Norris, 2000) describes as the layering of an onion, which reveals no core but is only an endless succession of layers (p.63). Thus the materiality of cloth breaks down the boundaries between self and the world and emphasizes connections with others while renewing the self (p.63).

Not only does the meaning of the artifact transform when the context changes, so does its narrative and the created identity it carries. Because objects carry their biography and carry the identity of their creator within them, and because with globalization individuals seek to maintain cultural identity, there is a threat of identity being displaced and appropriated through consumption (Mohlman, 1999; Tiffany, 2004). The threat of identity loss occurs when cultural artifacts are removed from their cultural contexts, because they may take on meanings that are significantly divergent from the meaning they originally held.

Carpets also carry the narrative of culture, the creator's identity and biography. In global consumption people unconnected with carpet traditions adopt its creations out of context, as their own traditional artifacts. If the carpet is woven and remains at home, it

communicates one narrative, communicating a past and experience directly, but even at a distance, with the intervening filters of the middlemen and marketplace, it still has a narrative that evokes something, be it memory or imagination, and convinces the buyer to add the carpet to their own narrative as expressed by their possessions.

Identity through Possession, Social Networking and Consumption

Human life consists of interactions among people and things that are described 'material culture' or artifacts (Rathje & Schiffer, 1982 as cited in Schiffer, 1999, p.2). Schiffer notes what makes human beings unique are interactions with innumerable kinds of artifacts in the course of daily activities (p.2). Ballini & Bernard (2002), in their foreword to *The Social Life of Objects* write: "Objects derive their meaning and efficacy from the economic, social and psychological motivations of individuals within their society. In itself, an object is only a potential signifier that becomes meaningful through the mediating role it is made to play. This meaning is derived from what people project on the object" (p.4). The meaning of objects varies when the object is placed in different contexts (p.5). Objects also function as signs or symbols that may serve as vehicles for status and social class (p.5). In addition, the physical features of the object can link to the meaning to be communicated (p.7). The meaning is constructed by the manner in which spatial and temporal dimensions of the object—physical, social, historical- are dealt with (p.7). For example, for a Samoan mat to be valuable, it must meet certain aesthetic or material criteria such as color or texture and the history it embodies (p.8). Another example is the Kula exchanges (Malinowski, 1922, cited in Ballini & Bernard, 2002) in which armbands and necklaces when circulating in opposite directions are personalized

with a name and a rank, and with each of their movements within the social space their genealogical history gains depth and the holders of the most aged pieces achieve the greatest prestige (p.8). "Traditional objects are the bearers of a mythical or historical memory: most imported objects, which are lacking in both, can therefore never be true replacements, valid in all contexts" (p.8). "An object belonging to a group is a testimony to the origins of that group and the objects that embody the identity of the group have neither usage value nor exchange value" (p.17).

Soutter (2000) describes how a tortoiseshell necklace with a locket containing a photograph of a great-grandfather became a family heirloom (p.213). She notes that the necklace raised a number of issues relating to social status, iconography of power, gender relations and conspicuous consumption within the bourgeois culture of late-nineteenth century New York (p.215). She states that jewels worn by mourners exhibited the wealth and status of a dead husband. She states that the photograph inside the locket is evidence of wealth and an expression of identity and passage of time (p.220). Soutter argues that the "heirloom is a special category of artifacts and while meanings of all artifacts shift over time, an heirloom's meaning accrues and resonates over generations, adding patina to the family name" (p.225). Soutter notes that the tortoiseshell locket is a talisman of a privileged culture that links her to the achievements of her ancestors (p.225).

Individuals utilize the exchange and commodification of traditional objects and artifacts as a source of, and a means of communicating prestige and create elaborate networks of value and meaning largely separate from the traditional meaning. For example, high-quality antique carpets are not available to 'ordinary' people but only to those with significant resources, so aside from the museums, which amass collections of

these historic artifacts. Carpets are owned by rich individuals who demonstrate their taste and status by the value of their collection.

Spooner (1986) explores the notion of possessing an alien thing, the carpet, by Westerners, and argues that the consumption of these carpets by Westerners has made them a commodity rather than an authentic artifact. He discusses how the carpets we receive are divorced from their social context and the westerners' desire for authenticity prompts them to reconstruct that context (p.195). Spooner cites Said, who wrote in 1978, "The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture" (p.195).

Displacement, Exile, Global Commodities and Local Identities

Parkin (1999) suggests that 'transitional objects' of sentiment carried by people engrave their memory of self and personhood (p.303). Kibreab (1996, as cited in Parkin) notes, "Fundamental to the protection of human well-being is ensuring respect for the fact of belonging" (p.310). He goes on to explain that belonging relates not only to a community of people, but to a 'motherland' or 'fatherland'. Human beings are terrestrial creatures with roots in a land and its history. Parkin suggests that a person lacks a fixed, decontextualized essence; rather their roots are made through social interaction and meanings of things that stand in a special relationship (p.314).

When I was a child, I hated carpets. There were new carpets for the New Year, new carpets from different regions and with different designs, and always stories about carpets. When I left Iran, I began to like carpets because I could identify myself with my past, with carpets as a metaphor for culture and tradition, through which I could revive my identity. The link between the weaver and I is that the weaver's identity is through the

carpet in that location. In this contested landscape, where my identity is in conflict, I get my cultural connection to Iran through carpets. The transformation between being an Iranian and Canadian caused me to examine the rich literature of loss of identity in displacement and compare insights with those I gained through my experience, and to add this dimension to my research narrative.

In the literature discussing loss of identity, Dudley (2002) explores the Karenni refugees, living in exile in Thailand, who comprise a diverse population from Burma's smallest ethnic state. The author describes how the global flows of objects and images play a significant role in people's construction of their contested identity (p.169). Appadurai (1996 as cited in Dudley, 2002) describes the mass-mediated objects and images that are characterized by global flows as "diasporic public spheres" (p.170) that deeply affect the politics of adaptation and exile. Unlike Appadurai and Kopytoff (1986 as cited in Dudley, 2002), who believe that objects are culturally bounded and the meaning of objects are of cultural significance, Dudley is interested in the relationships between people and objects and the symbolic values that people attribute to objects (p.169). Karenni refugees, through their consumption, are conscious of living through objects and images not of their own making (Bourdieu, 1984; Habermas, 1987, et al., as cited in Dudley, pp.172-173), but of items obtained from foreign visitors, such as electronic devices, T-shirts bearing names of rock legends and jeans that constitute "modernity" and a sense of belonging to a global space.

McGuckin (1997) explores the Tibetan refugee carpet industry and questions the authenticity of the carpets resulting from commodification of this ancient handicraft. He states that although carpets remain functional objects for Tibetans, they are also mass-

produced commodities targeted towards tourism and export markets (p.293). The carpets are secular 'folk arts' that are often modified for Western markets so that they no longer retain Tibetan motifs (p.293).

D'Alisera (2001), in *I ♥ Islam*, explores how Muslim Sierra Leoneans living and working as taxi drivers and food kiosk venders in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area reinforce religious identity through a variety of Islamic commodities. She notes that items ranging from bumper stickers through Qur'anic verses in Arabic to Kosher hot dogs are physical manifestations of experiences of many Sierra Leonean transmigrants living on the borders between homeland and a global Islam, and a means of displaced individuals to make community in transnational space (pp.92-93). The religious objects that decorate the taxis' interiors are a means of 'making Muslim space' or transforming a physical space into a site of cultural identity (Metcalf, 1996 as cited in D'Alisera, 2001) and a sense of self. Thus, the taxi becomes "a vehicle in which multiple social codes interact" (p.93). The display of these religious objects re-presents a "visual narration of cultural negotiation" in which meaning and understanding are mediated and articulated (Ybarra-Frausto, 1991 as cited in D'Alisera, p.93). Therefore, the act of display is a way of constructing the past, present and future that is a resonant evocation of a larger, past world (Greenblatt, 1991 as cited in D'Alisera, p.94). D'Alisera notes, "The inscription of workplace conveys a sense of positioning one in a constructed community that is rooted in memories of a Sierra Leonean homeland...ultimately re-experienced through the reinvention of an imagined Islam" (p.94). She further explains that the act of display is embedded within what Naficy (1993 as cited in D'Alisera), in his discussion of Iranians living in Los Angeles, has called "ambivalences, resistances, slippages, doubling, and

even subversions of the cultural codes of *both* the home and host societies that results in a hybridized exile culture" (p. xvi). The Sierra Leoneans, like Iranian exiles, inscribe and communicate "home, the past, memory, loss, nostalgia, longing for return, and the communal self" (Naficy, 1993 as cited in D'Alisera, p.95) onto their everyday lives and situate themselves between 'here' (America) and 'there' (homeland). "Objects as bridge-building devices blur the distinction between multiple worlds as distant and disjunct spaces and as such their placement condense and compress memory and become a source of recollection and longing for an imagined past" (D'Alisera, p.95). D'Alisera further notes that these objects, as global religious 'tests,' and a frame of reference through which experience is mediated, function as symbols of affiliation to a global community of Muslims (as well as Sierra Leonean Muslims) where a perceived authentic past links itself to the present (pp.75-98). By displaying these objects, as Spooner (1986 as cited in D'Alisera) notes, the owners make a social statement about themselves as they wish others to see them. In sum, d'Alisera expresses that "Islam has become as a thread that binds" (p.99).

Bender (2001) recognizes the importance of the politics of contested landscapes, landscapes of movement and migration, in which "people in a turbulent world create a sense of place and belonging, loss or negation" (p.59) — landscapes that are always in process and in which people engage with the material world around them (Bender, 1993 as cited in Bender, 2001, p.61). She further notes,

> ...depending on who we are (gender, ethnicity and so on) and the biographical moment, we understand and engage with the world (real and imagined) in different ways. Which bit of ourselves we bring to the encounter also depends upon the context and as neither place nor context nor self stays put, things are always in movement, always becoming....Landscapes contain the traces of past activities, and people

> select the stories they tell, the memories and histories they evoke, the interpretative narratives that they weave, to further their activities in the present-future where silent voices can become more audible" (Bender, pp.62-63).

Thomas (1996) elaborating on Bender's comment, notes: "...memory is not the true record of past events but a kind of text which is worked upon in the creation of meaning. Identities are continually crafted and recrafted out of memory, rather than being fixed by the 'real' course of past events...." (as cited in Bender, 2001, p.62). Bender (2001) further states, "The tensioned landscapes in movement occur both at macro and micro levels affecting socio-cultural and individual narratives" (p.63). He argues that "by moving along familiar paths and winding memories and stories around places" in which sight, sound, smell and touch are all involved, people create a sense of self and belonging (p.63). As individuals carry on with their everyday lives, perspectives unfold as life comes and goes out of focus and the story takes on different meanings, but the focus is always on familiar places (Feld & Basso, 1996 as cited in Bender, p.64). Their sense of place and landscape extends out from local and concrete fields to larger temporal and spatial fields of relationships and the memory of the experience always moves backwards and forwards (Edholm, 1993; Pred, 1990; Sontag, 1983:385-401 as cited in Bender, p.64). Every movement between here and there also encompasses a movement within here and there, in which imagination weaves itself (Minh-Ha, 1994 as cited in Bender, p.66).

The need for a sense of place is satisfied by translating past memories into the surroundings to create a familiar environment. Naficy (1993) explores the contradictory way in which Iranian immigrant media and popular cultural productions serve as a source both of resistance and opposition to the domination by the host country (United States) while simultaneously serving as vehicles for personal and cultural transformation and

assimilation of those values. He argues that exile is a "process of becoming" which involves separation from home, a period of liminality and in-betweenness that causes an attempt to incorporate similarities from the native culture into the dominant host country. Through the exiles' process via media and popular culture, Iranian exiles in Los Angeles produce and consume their own experiences of separation. They have created a symbolic and fetishized private electronic *communitas* infused with home, past, memory, loss, nostalgia, longing for return and the communal self (p.xvi). The many aspects of material culture and its interpretations discussed above were essential in my process of discovering and eliciting the stories women weave into their carpets. In my interpretation of material culture and experience I link the weaver's identity to my own discovering of my identity as a woman displaced through immigration from my history. I do this interpretation of meaning of the very artifacts which is for her a central expression of self.

The Weaver as Creator and Artist

The human ecology perspective on aesthetics as a discipline was used to inform my research process while looking at carpets as artifacts through which the weavers express their talent and imagination in both design and color. I aimed to investigate the role of women and examine the phenomenon of aesthetic development in producing this culturally significant artifact within a particular family setting. For this study it is important to appreciate the role of the artisan and the creative process as it applies to carpet making.

Carpenter (1988) notes, "if you want to see art functioning fully as human ecology, you must go back in history to Homer or Sophocles, or turn to tribal conditions

of the Third World. For primitive peoples, where the role of artist and shaman is interchangeable, the art object serves a sacred function in mediating between the individual human being and the unconscious spirit world of nature (p.2). Cultural objects are treasured for their spiritual significance in some parts of the Third World. Artists function as documenters of social change and at the center is the personality of the artist herself. Carpenter states that at the same time that art condenses life, it also lifts living out of the everyday and makes it transpersonal, so that we understand ourselves in terms of myth, which is an organic, cultural narrative of our experience" (p.6).

To understand the significance of and the meaning-making process of carpet production, one has to examine the phenomenon of aesthetic development within carpet making. Nomadic and traditional carpet-weaving are expressions of an art form because the weavers weave design, images and color into their carpets from their own imaginations and what they are inspired by. Because this material artifact captures traditional and personal knowledge, in a static product, and can evoke feelings and emotions expressed as colors and forms, this art can provoke and facilitate a discussion, particularly when it is used in preliminary and ongoing phases of narrative inquiry and data collection.

Pratt (1993) writes "the human species is widely acknowledged to have shifted evolutionary pressures from its body to its culture, tools, and thought. In the process we have constructed an intangible world made of history, imagery, ideas and norms. Thus, we inhabit both an 'inner world' and an 'outer' one. An 'ecology of knowing' connects our inhabitation of these two worlds" (p.94). Pratt goes on to say that "Our ways of knowing and the things that we know (or think we know) take form in ideas, myths,

rituals, dance, song, art, science, and are even expressed in words themselves" (p.94). Pratt states that artistic forms of knowing mediate environmental relationships that inform and shape our action for change (p.94). Bronfenbrenner (1979, p.3 as cited in Bubolz and Sontag, 1993, p.424) further notes that the object of art serves a "sacred function in mediating between the individual human being and nature", where art has been applied to human environmental relationships since ancient times (p.13).

Carpenter (1988) describes art as a transformative process providing another dimension to the betterment of the human being. Carpenter further elaborates on the aesthetic values, saying that the artist does not imitate the physical world as it is, but transforms it "into the human world by creating something which is not reality but a metaphor for reality, reality as perceived by a human consciousness so that the result is nature, thought and feeling inextricably bound together" (p.1). Carpenter argues that "the deeper structures of human experience are unconscious, shadowy, and difficult for most of us to locate" (p.1). He says these patterns make themselves visible and comprehensive through art (p.3). Considering that human ecology is the study of all fields of human relations between the structures of the physical world and the categories of human thought, arts-based research can bring a new vision to exploring these relationships. A purely scientific method that deals with numbers and theory is not capable of providing insights into the human experience and the inner life of artisans and craftspersons. Furthermore, even before language was developed, the human species communicated through cave drawings and mythic knowing. Aesthetic knowledge is a "mode of perception that does not separate the subject from object in order to obtain a verifiable repeatable result" (Pratt, 1993, p.2). Rather, aesthetic knowledge is concerned with the

unconscious creative perception in which the beauty and structure of the nature are subjectively experienced and transformed.

In their early research Mead and Bateson conducted ethnographic studies, in which they only documented in writing what they had observed. After reconsideration of the aesthetic perception and communication, Mead and Bateson (1942 as cited in Harper, 1993, p. 404), in their study of Balinese culture, utilized photography because they felt that words alone were inadequate for communication of knowledge and understanding of that culture. The task of incorporating, representing and understanding of Balinese culture required photographs and words together. In a similar way use of photography in my research allowed me to give meaning to the act of carpet creation with the family in their home and village. Photography also enabled me to capture images of the process of the carpet production including the designers, the dyers and the carpet merchants in the bazaar. Knowledge elicited, compiled and uncovered through photographic articulation of communal knowledge and narrative in my research benefits the preservation of knowledge. Photographs of a family of carpet weavers including their relationship process and products involved facilitates understanding and teach aspects about another culture that might otherwise be abstract. Photographs visually present knowledge, similar to the collections of textiles which have large vaults devoted to the preservation of the beautiful clothing and artifacts from various countries as aesthetic evidence of cultures. These artifacts signify an aesthetic dimension of individuals who, in the process of creating, transform their knowledge into their works in order to preserve their heritage. The process of preserving photography and textiles as artifacts and documents of human history convinces me that art speaks for itself and that the visual appearance of any art

form can transmits knowledge that can be employed through teaching.

Supporting these arguments and being aware that one of the philosophies of social science is the interpretive perspective. When conducting integrative research in human ecology it is necessary to focus on understanding the systems of belief and modes of communication in interpretation of human experience (Keat & Urry, 1975 as cited in Sontag, Bubolz, Nelson, & Abler, 1993). Using photography as a means of communicating perspective, I visually interpreted the lived experiences of women carpet weavers in a rural home-based setting.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

As I present the methodology used in this study, I also review the literature demonstrating how photography and photo-elicitation and fieldwork using photography (by researcher and participants) can aid in developing, manipulating, documenting, retaining, and transforming knowledge. As a documentary photographer/artist, I used photography and videography to collect visual data and to compliment textual data. I examined identity, social and economic issues for carpet weavers, and at the same time collected stories from the family members, which were then incorporated into the research with my own story as an exile rediscovering a part of my Iranian culture.

Photography has the potential to articulate the ways that images can generate valuable and transformative visual knowledge that would otherwise remain hidden. To justify the value of employing photography as a core component in a narrative study, I review the summarized literature.

A Postmodernist Framework

In order to contextualize the methodology used in this project, I will present the ideological framework within which my methodological choices were made as a researcher. I identify with postmodernism, as presented by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), recognizing that "postmodernism" is a contemporary sensibility that privileges no single authority, method, or paradigm" (p.15). The multiple methodologies of qualitative research may be viewed as a *bricolage*, and the researcher as *bricoleur* (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 2). The *bricoleur* understands that research is an interactive process shaped by

his/her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the individuals in the setting. The outcome is a *brieolage*, a complex, dense, reflexive, collage-like creation that represents the researcher's images, understanding and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis. "Qualitative researchers use ethnographic prose, historical narratives, first-person accounts, still photographs, life histories, fictionalized facts, and biographical and autobiographical materials, among others" (Denzin & Lincoln, p.6).

Narrative inquiry is one of many qualitative research methodologies within postmodernism that offers insights into human lived experiences. I was drawn to that methodology since it values the lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994) of myself and others and recognizes that as a researcher I co-construct meanings with co-participants.

Narrative Inquiry as Methodology

Narrative inquiry is a research methodology concerned with the study of experience and storied moments of time and space in human lives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that individual and collective experiences are temporal. The experiences are not only concerned with life in the here and now but also with life as it is experienced on a continuum—people's lives, institutional lives, lives of things. All these experiences are contextualized within a longer-term historical narrative. Kerby (1991, p.16) reflects on experience as "a set of Chinese boxes", one fitting inside the other which has an ever unfolding richness "before our reflective gaze." Richardson (1997) states that "the narrative voice is telling the story of the disempowered, not by judging, blaming,

or advising them, but by placing their lives within the context of larger social and historical forces and by directing energy toward changing those social structures that perpetuate injustice" (p.19). Allowing the voices is to avoid homogenization. Since story telling is the closest approach to understanding lived experiences (Denzin 2003, p.239), and photography is my personal passion, photography was introduced during the research as a data collection strategy to elicit information and to enhance the narratives with a visual component.

Narrative inquiry is participatory research in which the researcher both lives in, and tells, the story as it evolves. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discuss Geertz's metaphor of the researcher joining a parade and being a part of a landscape that is always shifting. Clandinin and Connelly note that

> ...the sense of tentativeness relates to the way in which one is positioned in the parade. We know what we know because of how we are positioned. If we shift our position in the parade, our knowing shifts. The second sense of tentativeness comes about, says Geertz, because as the parade changes, our relative positions change. (p.16)

The complex three dimensional narrative inquiry space emphasized by Clandinin & Connelly necessitates inward and outward observations of the researcher's position in the parade as well as backward and forward connections throughout the field experiences.

Living in the Field

My research interest focused on the experiences of a rural family-run carpet making operation in Iran. I conducted fieldwork centered on a carpet-weaving family (Abdol's extended family in Qom) spanning three generations. In the following section, I

describe the nature of the weaving operation and in particular, the social relations that exist between Abdol as the head of the family and each family member. Specifically, my inquiry focused on the experiences of the weavers in a small home-based family-run carpet operation in rural Iran, the role of the family organization in preserving historical and cultural traditions surrounding carpet production, and the roles within the family that contribute to the experiences of the carpet making enterprise. I documented the responsibilities of the women, children and men in the family run carpet making operation by collecting stories from family members, interviewing, observing, videotaping and photographing them. By placing cameras into their hands, they provided me with photographs taken from their perspective and the opportunity to elicit feedback on their choice of images and the stories contained therein.

By choosing to operate from the perspective of a *bricoleur*, I opened a wealth of options for eliciting and interpreting stories. In the words of Denzin and Lincoln (2003):

> The material practices of qualitative inquiry turn the researcher into a methodological (and epistemological) *bricoleur*. This person is an artist, a quilt maker, skilled craftsperson, a maker of montages and collages. The interpretive *bricoleur* can interview, observe, study material culture, think within and beyond visual methods; write poetry, fiction and autoethnography; construct narratives that tell explanatory stories; use qualitative computer software; do text-based inquiries; construct *testimonios* using focus-group interviews; even engage in applied ethnography and policy formulations (p.570).

The processes of composing field texts for this study included collecting stories through interviews, conducting talking circles with the family, composing and collecting photography and videography, having co-participants take photos, writing and compiling field notes, journaling and engaging in participant observation - which offered opportunities - to move from being a complete outsider to becoming an insider through

the course of the study. The combination of these strategies allowed a broad exploration of my research question and enabled the collection of rich textual and visual data.

Photography in the Field

The visual telling of stories unfolds as open-ended visual narratives that provide the researcher with metaphoric, cultural and sub-cultural images. Photographic images offer an in depth understanding of the complexity of the family and their relationships. My photographs are an extension of who I am and how I view the world. My interpretation of the world is guided by my passion to make visible the invisible and human lives on the fringe by the release of the shutter. When I am behind the camera, I photograph what I hope to draw attention to and to portray circumstances. My selective observation is an interpretation of my lived experiences, beliefs and intangible delicate memories that float in my mind. I try to make them real and reachable by photographing those moments and printing them on silver paper. These moments when photographed become a marker.

Photography is often believed to be an imitation of the truth, but the truth that each photographer imitates is not the truth that is observable to the naked eye. The fact that each photographer chooses to capture a particular image at certain time and under certain lighting conditions and preferring one exposure to another implies that the truth is not an objective truth, but a subjective truth that influences and reflects the photographer's social, cultural and political beliefs and values. Like many artists who express themselves and communicate through their artwork, photography is my way of communicating.

Photography has been used in sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, education

and visual communication to collect and describe the field conditions and relationships that existed during data collection. Visual methodologies can be used in any research design that depends on visual evidence, whether produced by researchers or not (Harrison, 2002). Collecting, storing, and displaying this visual information is essential because large amounts of the data included in written field reports come from visual observations. Photography not only documents the actual events it interprets them since the photograph captures one perspective of the multiple realities known to the photographer, whose lived experience falls along the continuum of time and place of the subject of the research. Through photography, the data provides a site for "the linking of the living with the studying of living" (Clandinin, 2000, p. xxiv) since it captures experiences that are frozen in time. Thus, as Holland (1991) observes, photographs have audiences beyond the present (as cited in Harrison, 2003). Photographs are at once signs and objects, documents of actual events, images of absent things, and real things in themselves (Bach, 1988). Berger (1972) explains,

> The photograph, because it preserves the appearance of an event or a person, has always been closely associated with the idea of the historical. The ideal of photography, aesthetics apart, is to seize an "historic" moment... photographs convey a unique sense of duration. The I am is given its time in which to reflect on the past and to anticipate its future: the exposure time does no violence to the time of the I am: on the contrary, one has the strange impression that the exposure time is the lifetime (p.47).

Photographs capture the narrative's moment and each revisit reconstructs the story whether of each other or whether we reinvent what we wish had happened. Hardy (1978 cited in Ely, Vinz, et al., 1997) elaborates on narrative saying "there is an inner and outer storytelling that plays a major role in our sleeping and waking lives...for we dream in narrative, day dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt,

plan, revise, criticize, construct, learn, hate, and love by narrative" (p.64).

In addition to utilizing narrative inquiry in words and interviews, I gave co-participants a Polaroid camera and asked them to photograph subjects of interest. The resulting photographs were then discussed bringing the photographer and their photograph more securely and completely into the inquiry. According to Clark-Ibanez (2004), "Researchers can use photographs as a tool to expand on questions and simultaneously, participants can use photographs to provide a unique way to communicate dimensions of their lives". Clark-Ibanez cites Schwartz (1989) as saying, "Photographs elicit extended personal narratives that illuminate the viewers' lives and experiences, especially when viewed in a group setting" (p. 1507). Becker (1986) and Schwatz (1989 as cited in Clark-Ibanez) state that images generated by participants are capable of triggering meaning for the interviewee, generating multiple meanings in the viewing process, and "generating data that illuminate a subject invisible to the researcher but apparent to the interviewee" (pp. 1515-1517). It is the photographer's perspective that is communicated through photographs. Providing the co-participants with the opportunity to communicate through textual and visual narrative validates their view in the study.

Composing Field Texts: The Camera and the Photograph

> Often called "the mirror with a memory," photography takes the researcher into the everyday world, where the issues of observer identity, the subject's point of view, and what to photograph become problematic. No technology is neutral ideologically. The camera is an ideological tool. It represents reality in a particular way, including a way that hides the observer's presence there is no such thing as an objective record of social life.... (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 240).

Anthropologists Mead and Bateson used photography to validate their study of

Balinese culture. Their photography proved that photographs were not just a mechanical record of reality, rather they were (and are) indexes that establish a few points of certainty/fact. As Barthes (1977) notes, "An image produces signification and contains messages" (as cited in Gottdiener, 1995, p.22). The meaning of photographs arises in a narrative context; when images are put side by side they tell a story so multi-dimensional that no textual research can compete even if written in elaborate depth and detail. While reviewing the literature I came across large body of research in which photography was utilized.

The essence of a photograph differentiates it from other forms of representation is its relationship to time. The moment a shutter is released, the subject matter is frozen in time in a way that is irreversible. "People take up photography at times of rapid change in their lives when the photograph is most clearly expressive of the wish to hold time still and to have greater opportunity to consolidate the ordinarily fleeting experience of the moment" (Colson, 1979 as cited in Cronin, 1998, p.273). Similarly, Barthes claims that when we see a photograph "we cannot deny that its referent once existed" (as cited in Cronin, p.72). A photograph therefore is evidence of the past reality and as Bourdieu (1965 as cited in Cronin, p.73) states "photographs are a protection against time." Clandinin & Connelly (2000) discuss how a photograph "marks a special memory", "a captured moment around which we construct stories" (p.114).

The nonverbal presentation of photographs can also help to overcome problems of illiteracy and facilitate questioning across the language barrier in cross-cultural studies. Photographs can stimulate participants to express multiple feelings about themselves and their culture, whether the images are taken by themselves or by the photographer (Collier,

Jr., & Collier, 1986, p.122). Photographs are visual re-presentations that are similar to that of journal entries and field notes (Bach, 1998, p.39) and they can be documents, visual maps and carriers of cultural meaning (Berger, 1984 as cited in Hunt, 1997, p.67).

Given that the family is a cultural construct (Badir, 1993, p.3) and each family incorporates and makes their own these culturally embedded rituals that legitimize the individual's membership in the family, it follows that as time goes by these family traditions become the "stuff of memories." The memories reconfirm their lives lived with others, where their experiences and stories are shared and important to others and are part of the lives of others (Glossop, 1988, p.3). Within 'Abdol's family', carpets are the visual cultural "stuff of memories", and the stories told unfold as young generations age and assume the family traditions. The intergenerational sharing of stories about previous family members connects several generations in time. The temporal and spatial nature of intergenerational stories makes photography ideal in capturing what cannot be fully told in words.

Families exist in and over time and across periods of time through generations (Morgan, 1985 cited in Bubolz & Sontag, 1993, p.430). Photography documents, across time, the material possessions, such as artifacts, family's heirlooms which are passed down to the next generation. The use of photography permitted me to explore the family space where the loom is set up and the events, actions and processes occurred, continuously and sequentially related to one another in the past, the present and the future. Taking photographs and eliciting them from the subjects allowed me to explore 'Abdol's family' in the context of their interaction within their "culture made material" (Glassie, 1999, p.41)—in the form of carpets—or "material made of culture", and study the

changes had occurred and did occur both in the family and in the community over time and space.

Social researchers find images of social life to be more credible when they are backed up by other data including commentary from the people they depict. The use of photography also alleviates the typical problems encountered in the orientation phase of the research project. When a researcher enters into a different cultural setting from his/her own, it takes time for the researcher to familiarize her/himself with the culture and the subjects of investigation. This might be a lengthy process before the actual research begins. Photography can accelerate this orientation experience. The researcher/photographer can take some photographs of the participants' community and show them to the participants to prompt discussion at the initiation phase. This initial session of feedback in photo interviewing can be very gratifying, establishing a shared sense of identity between co-participants and the stranger-observer.

As a visual artist, my world is not limited to the studies that do not incorporate visual data and that lack imagination and creativity. This aesthetic extension is one of the underlying assumptions of human ecology: aesthetic knowing is a transformative process that transcends the limits of analytic language. Research conducted from a position of scientific empiricism lacks an aesthetic quality that could if present lend credibility to the research findings. Gadamer (as cited in Becker, 1998, pp.84-96) contrasts the methodical procedures of scientific rationality with the capacity of art to reveal a deeper truth about human existence. 'Truth' for Gadamer (following Heidegger), is the uncovering of the meaning of being, a relationship in which not only the being of the thing we study but also our own being comes into question. Thus, for Gadamer the

experience of art is a revelation of truth. Art, as Aristotle stated, is a way of knowing, knowing by making, by observing and taking action. Capturing the aesthetic was especially important for this study carpet-weaving is a creative process in which the very being of the person who makes the carpet is woven into it in such a way that no words can describe. Thus research findings that attempted to communicate the meaning of this experience without presenting its aesthetics would lack a fundamental credibility.

Making use of the richness of meanings embedded in photographs, and the photographs' ability to stimulate and enhance the value of empirical research, I used photography in my research field work both to accumulate visual knowledge and to document practical knowledge that would provide credible evidence of the micro and existential nature of an Iranian carpet-weaving family. Through photography I established a rapport with my co-participants and elicited knowledge that might otherwise have been invisible to me. Photo-elicitation, putting cameras into the hands of the subjects and returning with the Polaroid photographs, in order to elicit responses through images, brought the co-participants into the research process as interpreters and active collaborators rather than passive objects of the study.

Composing Field Texts: Interviews and Co-participant Observation

Interviews and participant observation were also used in the data-gathering process, sometimes informed with photography, videography and photo elicitation, and sometimes as independent tools for exploring and making meaning. The essence of observation is the attempt of the researcher to understand of a community being researched from the community's point of view. Seeking to understanding what the world

is like to the people who function in that world guides the researcher to learn about what community members do, know, make, and use (Norman, 1991). In this way, interviews help the researcher understand the unit of investigation through direct inquiry and elucidate what was not understood through observation. In my interviews, photography, videography and data-gathering processes were conducted around the carpet loom as the main focus.

I have worked as a professional photographer for the last 20 years in various communities in Canada; I am also a native speaker of Farsi (Persian) and lived half of my adult life in Iran. Thus as a participant observer, I was able to use research tools - photography and the narrative language of the co-participants - that allowed me to attempt to understand this community from their own perspective. Being familiar with this language and culture enabled first-hand investigation without losing concepts and meanings in language translation. Li- Young Lee (1990 as cited in Greene) describes my experience in the statement, "I daily face, this immigrant, this man with my own face. Or this woman..." (p.26). Clandinin & Connelly (2000) elaborate on this sentiment stating "narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical and that our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines" (p.121).

Another data collection method selected for this study was the in-depth semi-structured interview. Interviews were conducted with each member of the family separately in order to gather individual perspectives, experiences and stories. This was followed by a debriefing in a family talk circle and by asking co-participants to take

photographs. Interviews were conducted in Farsi, the native language of Iran and later translated into English.

Interviews are structured conversations that are conducted with the use of previously organized main questions, follow-ups, and probes by the researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.129). The objective is to have a tape-recorded interview with a willing person about a subject of mutual interest. Qualitative interviewing is "a conversation which requires intense listening, a respect for and curiosity about what people say, and a systematic effort to really hear and understand what people tell you" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.17). Interviewing is one of methodological tools in qualitative research that encourages a conversation through an artful craftsmanship of asking questions and listening that produces substantial amount of knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.47). Interviewing is also an active interaction between the researcher and the researched which leads to negotiated and contextually based results (Cicourel, 1964; Dingwal, 1997; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, 1998; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Kvale, 1996; Sarup, 1996; Seidman, 1991; Silverman, 1993, 1997 as cited in D. & L., 2003, p.62).

Denzin & Lincoln (2003) note "gaining trust is essential to the success of the interviews". To gain trust and establish rapport with the participants, Denzin & Lincoln suggest "the researcher must be able to take the role of the respondents and attempt to see the situation from their viewpoint" (p.78). To gain trust and establish a rapport with the head of the family and each member of the family before conducting the interviews, I arranged an informal visit with the carpet-weaving family. In the initial visit, I prepared the ground by explaining the research topic, the time that would be involved, their rights as co-participants, and how I intended to address issues of confidentiality. Upon my

arrival at the interview site, I offered the co-participants some gifts - which is a traditional custom of Iranian culture - and had the interviewees complete consent forms. I returned for the second visit after the co-participants had the opportunity to think about my research. I discussed the purpose of the study, the amount of time that would be needed to complete the interviews, privacy and confidentiality of the co-participants, their right to voluntarily withdraw from the research at any time, plans for using the results and the complete accessibility that the co-participants would have to the data. I conducted the interviews according to the format presented in Appendix A.

The result of my multi-faceted data collection techniques, both textual and visual, provided a complex wealth of information about the carpet-weaving family and about my personal life journey. Through all the years I have spent photographing the voiceless, and in spite of the fact that I wanted other people's voices to be heard, I unconsciously allowed the actual voices to be silenced, since I was the photographer and the sole author. It was only after I understood the narrative inquiry methodology that I realized I had missed an important component - my subjects' lived experiences and narratives.

Recording and Transcription of the Interviews

Prior to the interview, consent was obtained from the head of the family and each individual member of the family as well as permission to tape the interviews. Immediately after each interview, the tape-recorded data was transcribed and additional notes of points of interest were made in preparation for the next interview. In-depth investigations in a qualitative research require accuracy of the accounts reported by the qualitative researcher. This accuracy is ensured by rigor such as checking, re-checking,

comparing, contrasting, and verifying the data. During the fieldwork in Iran I was constantly journaling, photographing and documenting the details of my journey, attending carefully to the detail and documentation that would form a foundation of credibility to both my data and my findings.

Making Narrative Inquiry Plausible

While I was in Iran, I played the role of researcher co-participant and audience. I worried about my ability with the language and my understanding of the culture. The Iranian women's life experiences seemed so distant from mine. However, I knew that my use of photography would help overcome these difficulties. I recognized that many impressions of Iran are based upon stories of political unrest in Iran and media concerns with terrorism. I wondered if narratives about the everyday lives of women carpet weavers in a rural village would resonate with wider Canadian audiences or if they would dismiss it as insignificant. To help me understand these seemingly overwhelming concerns, I explored the narrative inquiry literature for answers and support.

Clandinin and Connelly (1990) pose the question "What makes a good narrative?" (p.7). The authors suggest when composing field texts, the researcher should always consider three dimensions. The first dimension is the continuum between the internal feelings or predispositions and the environment. The second is the temporal dimension of past, present and future, and the third dimension is the physical space. Clandinin and Connelly (1990) state that to convey the three dimensional narrative space in a plausible manner the researcher must always consider the co-participant's voices, signatures as well as the audience. The consideration of voices involves recognizing "the multiplicity of

voices" and "multiple plotlines" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.147). The researcher should strive to maintain balance while attempting to write text that ensures everyone's voice is heard. The consideration of signature revolves around the researcher's responsibility to balance the participant's identity with authorship. The researcher's signature can be "too vivid" and drown out the signature of the co-participants or "too thin" where the researcher turns over the authorship to the participants. The consideration of audiences refers to the researcher's peers and perceived readers of the final product. The feeling that the audience is "peering over the writer's shoulder" can influence the text.

I agree with Clandinin and Connelly's criteria and during my field work, translation, transcription and writing of the text, I seriously considered the multiple voices, signatures and the audiences that flowed throughout the present study. Criteria concerns became evident when I translated the co-participants' voices from the Farsi language into the English language. I recognized that translation was part interpretation. In some instances, I found it difficult to find the equivalent words to express an Iranian concept in the English language. Therefore, in order to protect the co-participants' voices, I conducted follow up conversations with each co-participant to ensure I had understood them accurately. After initial interview sessions, I returned to my sister's home and transcribed the interviews in the Farsi language. Then, during each return visit to 'Abdol's family', I confirmed the results from the previous interview by reading to them from my transcription. While initially I was concerned with questions such as "Is this what you said?" or "Have I gotten the words right?" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), with time, however, I moved to more global and human questions such as "Is this you? Do you see yourself here? Is this the character you want to be when this is read by others?"

hoping that their stories would resonate with others (p.148) and would trigger emotion, and move people (Tannen, 1988 as cited in Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.8). The process of revisiting the interviews and rereading the transcriptions allowed me to move deeper and deeper into their stories in a search of their voice.

During the journaling and writing of the text, I recognized that by including my voice and signature in the research there was a possibility that the co-participants' narratives might be unsettled. I was very attentive to my own stories and my co-participants' lives as I recounted my own childhood stories and the memories of returning home after years of being away. During the recalling and retelling of the narratives, many questions lingered in my mind. I became the audience of their stories and questioned myself whether I really understood their stories since I had been away for so long and their lives seemed so distant from mine. Potential problems led to me to concerned about the properties and quality of the narrative data I collected and questioned.

What then makes a good narrative? Is the story authentic and plausible enough to ring true? Will people be able to say, "I can see that happening"? The participating women and children only shared a small portion of their busy daily lives with me and on occasion, it was impossible for the women to speak openly. My concern about unsettling and co-opting their narratives was heightened because our time together was so restricted. I sensed that some details of their lives were silenced by the presence of other listeners. In addition, capturing their narratives was inhibited because the requirements of their daily duties left little time for them to actually tell the stories.

The stories of rural Iranian carpet-weaving women and children may be foreign to the English speaking audience, yet I hope that others learn from the stories of women who

live a nearly invisible existence. As I worked, I felt a sacred trust to accurately capture and note the meanings of the narratives. I hope that by giving voice to the women, I provide "an opportunity to reclaim their experiences" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989 as cited in Clandinin and Raymond, 2006, p.103). I also hope that "by introducing these women's narratives into the literature, a shift may occur in the social and institutional dominant discourses" (Lindemann 1995 as cited in Clandinin and Raymond, 2006, p.103). As I left Iran to return to my Canadian home, I wondered whether others would understand our collective stories, since there are numerous ways to understand the people in my country. Many people only read stories about political unrest and terrorism in Iran, so I wondered whether those people would be able to understand Iranian women's stories in the context of their everyday life.

The visual narrative component of the present study allowed me to attend to the criteria that would balance voice, signature and audience very well. The universal language of photography provided the presentation of the text with intimate views of the women's lives and experiences. The photographs did not require translation. The photographs aided the protection of voice because the images balanced insecurities in my translation of the tape recorded interviews. While composing the research texts, the photographs revealed details that may have otherwise been neglected. The videography and photography helped me to remember important moments with the family more vividly. "Each photograph marks a special memory in our time and trigger memories of important people and events ...around which we tell and retell stories" (Clandinin, 2000, p.114). The act of translation deepened our experience and my understanding since the depth of translation equaled the depth of our relationships. With time there was a clear

progression from very superficial limited encounters to very deep and meaningful conversations and encounters. The weavers began to trust me. They told me their stories, wishes, hopes and hardships in life. I, too, began to open up and talk about my life in another country, always remembering my childhood home.

Documentary Photography and Issues of Validity, Usefulness and Credibility

Issues concerning representation and legitimization have been raised in the field of arts-based research and, in particular, documentary photography. Issues concerning the role of theory in photographic representation, validity, reliability and sampling have been raised by social scientists. Becker (1974 as cited in Harper, 1993) notes that although photographs contain much information, some photographers limit themselves to a few simple statements which leads to work that is intellectually and analytically thin. He rejects the idea of photographs as "truth" and he states that they are just reflections of the photographer's point of view and biases and they are socially and technically constructed. Aligned with Becker's notion of truth', Harper (1993) says that the photographs do not represent "objective truth" (p.183). He goes on to say that the very act of observing is interpretive, for to observe is to choose a point of view. Harper also argues that photographs as cultural representations are not complete because culture cannot be contained within a boundary (p.406)

Wagner (2004) believes that a photograph is "socially constructed" (p.1481). He argues that we can learn about the social context that is produced by the photographs. Collier (1967) and Becker (1986) value photographs as useful and durable records of what was visible in a particular time and place (as cited in Wagner, p.1481). Wagner notes that

the idea that knowledge can be generated through machine- recorded data without human agency and choice of any sort is naïve. The idea is that a photographer's selectivity makes an image suspect (Schwartz, 1999). Wagner further states that the credibility of photographs rests not so much on whether they accurately reflect the real world but on whether or not those aspects are relevant to the question in mind (p.1481). The credibility of the photographs should lie in the evidence rather than the quality of the photograph. Becker describes the validity of photography in the context of representation and whether the question of interest has been fully explored. He states, "The nonverbal presentation can help to overcome problems of illiteracy and facilitate questioning across the language barrier in cross-cultural studies" (Becker, 1974 as cited in Harper, 1993). Collier Jr. and Collier (1986) wrote: "Feedback can stimulate people to express multiple feelings about themselves and their culture by letting them to produce their own photograph with the camera." (p.122) Bach (1998) posited: "Images suggest a space for visual re/presentation similar to that of journal entries, field notes, and artifacts better thought of as 'field texts'" (p.39).

I ameliorated issues around the use of documentary photography by showing my initial photographs to the interviewees for their feedback and discussion. At the same time, and possibly more importantly, because it is inevitable that a photograph is taken from a point of view, I asked the co-participants to take photos to assure that the point of view of the women I interviewed was firmly represented in the research, thus eliminating some of the bias. I also agree with Berger that "Photographs can be both document and picture, artifact and art, visual map and carrier of cultural meaning" (1984 as cited in Hunt, 1997, p.67). I believe that "Each photograph marks a special memory in our time, a

memory around which we construct stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.114) and that the stories my research reveals are richer for the use of documentary photographs.

Handling Interpretive Problems

Through my artistic work as a documentary photographer in the past, I have been able to develop a photo narration of the people in the periphery of society (Hutterites, Romany, prisoners, coal miners, assembly line workers). However, in all the documentary photography I have done over twenty-five years, the subjects were voiceless. I came from outside, took their photographs and put them up silently as if I were their only voice. But now, in the present narrative inquiry I gave the co-participants a photographic 'voice' of their own. By providing them with a camera to take pictures of their world, I was able to see their reality. This helped me elicit their stories and correct what might have been wrongly interpreted if I had relied only on my own photographic point of view. I chose narrative methodology not just because it fit the researcher but also because it fit the subjects. My subjects worked without words, in a visual medium, weaving their stories into the spatial narrative of the carpets. They framed and chose which images to represent. This allowed them to speak from their zone of comfort and then interpret the images of another visual, spatial medium.

Overall Research Protocol

The research protocol for the present study was developed taking into consideration ethical principles such as any risks involved and specific procedures regarding the conduct of the research. I flew to Iran for a period of two months. Upon my

arrival in Tehran, I stayed with my sister and her family for the first two weeks to familiarize myself with facilities and services such as the location of photo processing labs and supplies, as well as securing Internet accessibility, obtaining necessary permission from local authorities, and arranging transportation to Qom and Abu Zeyd Abad where my research fieldwork took place. Tehran is about a three hour drive from Qom, which is located in the central west of Iran. After two weeks, I traveled to Qom to start my fieldwork. I then arranged to have my first informal visit with my gatekeeper - the head of the family and the co-participants - and the other members of the family. I arranged the informal meetings to discuss my research topic, to gain access and to establish rapport. In order to prevent any unnecessary misunderstandings with local authorities, I arranged to travel to Qom in company with a relative who is more familiar with the current social customs and conditions than I am, as I had not been in Iran for more than a short visit since 1979.

I allowed for the local people's sense of time because of the limitation of only two months to complete the field work. In my last visit to Iran in 1994, during which I was restricted to a timeline in pursuing my photo-documentary of Rom, I noticed that people did not have a similar sense of the importance of an efficient use of time, and schedules did not seem to be taken as seriously as we do in Canada. I also allowed for technical challenges such as delays in gaining access to the Internet. My travel plans needed to always take these matters into consideration and yet maintain a flexible schedule around the contributors who helped me travel around Qom and find suitable, willing co-participants. I collected data with the use of a Polaroid camera for photos the co-participant took, a Nikon digital still camera, a Panasonic digital recorder and a Sony

camcorder. The Polaroid camera is easy to use, produces instant visuals, and saves a great amount of time in film processing which would have involved traveling back and forth to the lab in the city.

The Co-participants

The individuals who participated in the study are referred to as co-participants because narrative inquiry is a participatory methodology. The co-participants selected for the study were members of a family with three generations of carpet-weavers. I sought and found a family that matched the age criteria of a span between 13 and 60 years of age. The family in the study was representative of not only Iranian culture, but also of the demographic of carpet-weaving culture. Using three generations of co-participants allowed me to gain insight into each generation's life experience as carpet weavers, and collect stories that interrelated and intertwined with all of family members across those generations.

The aim of qualitative sampling is purposeful in order to understand the phenomenon of interest (as opposed to quantitative research where the goal is to generalize findings to the population from which the sample was taken) (Mayan, 2001). Mayan notes that with purposeful sampling the researcher chooses individuals and contexts in which the most and best information about the topic can be obtained. The individuals purposefully selected have personal experience and expertise on the topic being researched (pp. 9-10).

Before my arrival, my contacts in Iran had already been briefed on the study requirements and preliminary approaches to potential subjects who fulfill the criteria had

been made. I also had requested facilitation from the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization in Tehran, Iran, as a supplementary resource.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Denzin & Lincoln (1994) suggest that defining the inclusion criteria is vital in any research procedure. The inclusion and exclusion criteria construct an outline for a researcher in order to recruit co-participants that are suitable. Morse (1994) remarks that " a good informant is one who has the knowledge and experience the researcher requires, has the ability to reflect, is articulate, has the time to be interviewed, and is willing to participate in the study" (p.228).

The co-participants of this study were a family of eight, (father, mother, five children and grandparent) ranging in age from 16 to 60 years old who have been engaged in the carpet-weaving tradition through the generations. This family was chosen because of the significant narratives associated with carpet-weaving in each age group. Permission of the parents was obtained for all the child co-participants in the study if they were judged capable to participate. To protect the identity of the co-participants in the photographs their faces were blocked or blurred through Adobe Photoshop manipulation. For all photographs taken by the researcher or the co-participants, or use of any family album photographs in the publication or for exhibition purposes, consent forms were obtained.

Contingency Planning

Contingency planning included locating more than one family as back-up co-participants in case the selected family refused or had emergencies. I also provided for more than the planned two months visit in case procedural or research processes were delayed by matters beyond my control. I solved the problems of unforeseen delays and local technical difficulties by locating alternative sources of computers and photofinishing. While it is possible to predict the existence of some delays and difficulties because of cultural constraints, it is not possible to predict their exact nature or length. Because of the contingency planning I was able to remain flexible and when necessary I found solutions within the culture, which were augmented by my family and their community ties.

Summary: Making a Virtue of Necessity

Narrative inquiry is both a phenomenon and a process of gathering information for the purpose of research through storytelling. I believe, with Connelly and Clandinin (1990), that, "Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world." By placing much of the direction of the research into the hands of the co-participants asking them to take photographs, I enabled them to share their experience with significantly less filtering than if I, as the photographer/researcher, was in sole charge of their choices of image and camera angle/story and narrative angle.

Although the difficulty of "editing the world" remains inherent in the point of view the camera must take, I believe my research methodology eliminated my biases as

much as possible and accentuated the point of view of the co-participants. By asking the co-participants to take photographs, I overcame the researcher's bias and substituted the 'bias' of the co-participants. Since the research was intended to elicit the experience, story, and narrative response of the co-participants, the burden of interpretation was partially lifted from me as researcher at the same time I placed the power to develop narrative literally as well as figuratively in the hands of the co-participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

Through a Wide-Angle Lens: An Overview of Communication, Experiences and Context

Leaving Home

A brief summary of my experiences as an Iranian immigrant to Canada is provided here to offer the reader some insight into my anticipations and reflections on the whole experience. I initially left Iran a few months after the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979. I lived in England while pursuing photography training. After I graduated I immigrated to Canada in January of 1981 to join with my parents and younger sister.

It was a very cold and snowy day when I arrived at the Edmonton airport. I was wearing my Wellington green boots without having knowledge of the freezing temperature. My younger sister and her husband along with my parents came to pick me up. I could see the surprise in their faces when they spotted my Wellington rubber boots which were better suited for the English rainy conditions (see Plate #1, a- e).

a) Flying in

b) Edmonton at night

c) Luggage

d) Portfolio & Wellington boots

e) Ticket to a new life

Plate #1
Arriving in Edmonton
(Khorrami. 2007)

I stayed with my parents for two months. My parents had also left Iran a few months before the revolution and came to Canada to visit my sister, but they were forced to stay in Canada due to the volatile political situation in Iran. My father, who had worked most of his life behind a desk, now had to take any job to survive. My parents lived on my father's six dollar an hour job and I felt like another burden to them. The first thing my parents did was to buy me proper boots.

During my two month stay in Alberta, I traveled by Greyhound bus from my parents' rural home (see Plate #2, c). I was searching for work as a photographer in Edmonton which was a four hour round trip. While in Edmonton, I carried my heavy portfolios to different addresses, sometimes getting lost and sometimes hitchhiking to Jasper Avenue - the only place I was familiar with (see Plate #2, a-b). I remember the driver of one of the cars I hitchhiked with cautioned me of the dangers hitchhiking posed, especially for females. While going up and down the streets and avenues of Edmonton, I would sometimes seek refuge in a public washroom where I rested a while and attempted to keep warm (see Plate #2, d). I

a) Jasper Avenue

b) A moment on Jasper Avenue

c) Greyhound Bus Depot

d) Public washroom

e) Thawing cold hands

Plate #2
Another day job hunting
(Khorrami, 2007)

ran warm water over my frost bitten fingers (see Plate #2, e) and stretched my arms out because they were sore from carrying heavy portfolios. At the end of each day I would catch the downtown Greyhound to return to my parent's place. My trips paid off. I finally got a freelance photography contract from the government's department of art and culture.

As a result of securing employment I moved to Edmonton (see Plate #3, a-e). While fulfilling the duties in the contract, I stayed with a friend of my parents and, after the contract was over I rented a basement flat where I began working on other short-term contracts and other jobs not necessarily related to photography. Before I arrived in Canada I was very optimistic about a photography career, but soon I realized it was not what I had imagined. That's when I decided to become a freelance photographer. I combined freelance photography with my artistic desires. I traveled abroad to assemble images of indigenous people from distant places and present them to the Edmonton public to share the experiences of what it meant to be indigenous. This topic inspired

a) Jasper Ave becomes home

b) My Jasper neighbourhood

c) Downtown

d) Doorway to my first job

e) At the movie theatre

Plate #3
Becoming familiar
(Khorrami, 2007)

me because I am indigenous to another place, other than Canada.

Coming Home: the Research Project

June 16, 2006 was a hot summer night when I arrived to Tehran's airport at 2:00 a.m. I lined up with the rest of the passengers and looked to see if I could see any of my sister's family. There, in the corner of the restricted waiting room, where no visitor is allowed to enter except with a permit, I recognized my brother-in-law waving at me. That was a relief. I was puzzled by my mixed feelings of fear and joy. I was now looked at as an outsider and an alien, stretched between two lands, here and there- a thread connecting a living past and the present. Yet I felt as if I was coming home (see Plate #4, a-e).

I had been hesitant before I left Edmonton for Iran. The political tension between Iran and other countries was at its most extreme. I was discouraged by family and friends' warnings in Alberta that I should cancel my trip. People around Edmonton understood Iran from a fear that stemmed from too much negative media coverage. For weeks, I lived in

a) Me and my bird

b) Blurred identities

c) Mirgration

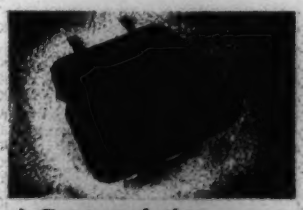
d) What is home?

e) Dis-placed

Plate #4
Identity
(Khorrami, 2007)

fear with a foggy mind. Then one morning I woke up with the thought, "Why am I afraid of my Motherland?" I was born and grew up there half of my life, and I have my roots in there. No matter which culture I have lived in, my roots still remained untouched. I admit that some of my branches have been re-rooted in different cultures, but my umbilical cord is still attached to my Motherland. That morning I made up my mind to go to Iran and I became more determined to make the trip no matter what the consequences.

Departure day arrived. I equipped myself with my camera, tape recorder, extra batteries, pens and pins and tapes, toilet paper and a small suitcase (see Plate #5, a-b). I took everything I imagined I would need and packed these extra materials just in case I couldn't find those items in Iran. Living in countries where privileges are basic rights and made available in abundance had warped my expectations without even realizing it. Later, I was shocked to find that there was a wealth of imported material available in Iranian shops at prices even cheaper than I had paid in Canada. This had not been the case twelve years ago when I



a) Contemplation

b) Packing essentials

Plate #5
Made up my mind!
(Khorrami, 2007)

visited. Things had changed, but my memory of the place had not. I felt embarrassed when I saw the skepticism in my sister's and niece's faces as I opened my suitcase full of pens and pencils and highlighters.

I left Edmonton for Tehran with a stop in London. I didn't feel strange in London because during the 70's I had lived there while attending school. On the contrary, I felt some sort of attachment that was hanging in the air. All of a sudden here was familiar ground, familiar store names, the English accent and way of life, the coffee shops and pastries. I walked into Harrods and bought myself a souvenir travel towel embroidered with the company name. To my surprise, right in the middle of the waiting area there was a Starbucks coffee shop. I was confused and somehow delighted. The Starbucks sign momentarily took me back to Edmonton where I drank coffee with friends, opposite Save-On Foods. My affiliation with Edmonton friendships popping up in London disoriented me briefly and then comforted me. How many homes do I have and where do I belong? I felt at home again. I walked into Starbucks and right away I knew what to order because the menu was all the same,

a) London Bridge

b) Harrods

c) Embroidered towel

d) Starbucks

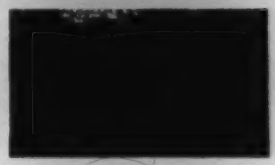
e) "Double chocolate moca"

Plate #6
Stop over in London
(Khorrami, 2007)

generic of some sort... "Tazeh Chai, double chocolate moca"... (see Plate #6, a-e).

As I enjoyed my coffee, I pondered my feelings. I was puzzled by the phrase "feeling at home." What does it mean to feel at home? Is home where we grow up? Is "feeling at home" a sense of belonging to a certain landscape (see Plate #7, b) and culture or it is what we create around ourselves? Could "feeling at home" be the highway that connects me to my parents in Alberta? A highway (see Plate #7, c) that has been the witness of my sadness and happiness: a time that I had to rush to the hospital on a cold and icy winter to see my father in the hospital after his first heart attack; or, the time that I traveled that highway to join my parents to celebrate *Norouz* (Iranian New Year) with them? Could "feeling at home" be connected to the collection of artifacts (see Plate #7, a) which represent the culture where one has lived? Or is "feeling at home" a sensory experience and imagination from exposure to places, sounds and smells that take us back in time to when we have stored our fondest memories in a dark suitcase, under

a) Artifact collection



b) Identity in question

c) Cold highway

d) Memory closet

e) Crossroads of human traffic

Plate # 7
Memories in transit
(Khorrami, 2007)

the stacked boxes of a young woman's dowry, or in our grandmother's (see Plate #7, d) closet?

The chain food stores in public places at the crossroads of human traffic (see Plate #7, e) make the unfamiliar familiar, I thought, and it is one of the hallmarks of the global village, a place where signs reinforce the presence of a phantom unity of all races, as if we all belonged to the same nation, yet living differently. I realized then how I have hung the notion of 'feeling at home' around my neck like a necklace of different kinds of stones, each representing a culture that, depending on where I feel at home, I can pull one down close to my heart and say, "Ah" how happy I am.

After hours of waiting in London's Heathrow airport, the passengers finally got aboard the plane for Tehran. I was the first person in line waiting for the transit area to open. I wore my scarf and long manteau to conform to the Islamic dress code. Time went slowly because I was anxious to get to my destination. Finally after many hours our airplane was on "the roof" of Tehran. The lights welcomed and excited me. Tehran is famous for its night-lights (see Plate #8, a-e).

a) Flight from London to Tehran

b) Tehran airport

c) Inside Tehran airport

d) City of Tehran at night

e) City of Tehran in daylight

Plate # 8
Arriving in Tehran
(Khorrami, 2007)

I was the first to board and the last person in line-up to get to the custom's officer sitting in his small glass security stall. When I approached him and gave him my passport he hesitated for a moment while looking at his computer. I was nervous and quiet. After a short time - which felt so long to me - he stamped my passport and, while handing it to me, said something that I can not remember because I was very nervous. I was just so glad that I was out of there. After all the security and passport checks, I went out of the transit area and hugged my brother-in-law who was waiting for me in the restricted area. I felt such relief as if I was a bird flying out of the cage (see Plate #9). Outside, my sister and her family were waiting for me - a beautiful night, the familiar air, the cars, people - I was melting from joy that covered the ground just like a carpet.

Plate # 9
Flying out of cage
(Khorrami, 2007)

a) Azan: call to pray

b) Appreciating the past

Plate #10
3:00 am in Tehran
(Khorrami, 2007)

We got home at 3:00 a.m. It was prayer time and I could hear *azan*, [the traditional call to prayer] sung by a *muezzin* and amplified now by speakers, echoing across the city. There is something majestic and mysterious about the sound of *azan*. I grew up in a religious family and when I was living with my

grandparents, the sound of *azan* was very symbolic (see Plate #10, a-b). Each time I heard it I knew it was time for prayer, lunch or supper. I never cared much for the *azan*, just like the way I disliked the carpets that were present in every household. But now having been away from my home country, my dislike has turned into an appreciation of both the carpets and the sound of *azan* that had become soothing and meditative just like the divine carpet that holds such significant meaning for me.

My sister gave her son's bedroom to me. The bed was right by the window and I could see the city. Their house is located on the north side and close to the mountains, and one can see the whole city from the roof of their house (see Plate #11, a-b). I couldn't go to sleep. The sun was almost coming up and I could hear the crows, the sparrows, and the pigeons that reminded me of my pet at home, a crippled dove (see Plate #11, c-e). I could hear the stroking sound of the broom of the street sweeper and the passersby's morning coughs. I woke up at 4 p.m. that day.

More than anything else, I wanted to visit places where I lived before. I had left Iran about thirty

a) My sister's home

b) Tehran from sister's roof

c) My crippled pet

d) I heard the crow

e) I saw the pigeons

Plate #11
Arriving at my sister's
(Khorrami, 2007)

years ago and needed to reconnect with my roots. Although I had gone back once twelve years ago for a photography project, I had had no opportunity to see places I held dear in my memories. Just two days after my arrival in Tehran, I went to the house where I used to live. I wanted to recollect past memories and revisit my roots - who I was then and who I am now. Just like the migrating birds, I was between here and there, visiting and revisiting the familiar, the unknown and the land that once embraced me in her arms. I visited my parents' house, my grandparent's house where I used to live while I was going to university, my childhood house, and even the public bath my mother used to take us to (see Plate #12, a-e). I visited them all. I felt a sense of belonging. When a photographic film is exposed to the light, it creates a latent image. My past was just like the latent photographic image on the negative that becomes visible only after it has been immersed in a fixer solution. A part of me that had become latent and kept in the shadows now was developing into a full image, and I felt complete. I had no fear and felt the whole

a) My childhood home

b) Neighbourhood church

c) Photographing every inch

d) The public bath

e) Neighbourhood grocery

Plate #12
Childhood places
(Khorrami, 2007)

neighbourhood belonged to me and no one was going to take it away from me.

The old Christian church which had been a landmark in my childhood was still there, but there were also many changes (see Plate #13, a-e). I tried to remember the old image before the changes and imagine the whole picture I knew when I was a child and a teenager still living there. People had passed away or were tucked away in old age, and a new generation, their children and grandchildren, are now running their businesses. In my time, when I was little, we did not have a water system yet; every house had an *Ab-anbar* (water reservoir) filled every week from the *joob* (water canal) coming to each house (see Plate #13, c). The *joob* that then divided the narrow street has now been covered to make room for more traffic: the noisy bikes, the trucks, the *barbar* [porters who carry bundles of goods on their backs] and kids with their bicycles. Now that there is a water system, there is no need for the water canal. However, there are places that these *joobs* exist, used not as a source of drinking water, but a canal to carry water coming from

a) Neighbourhood traffic

b) Alley near home

c) *Joob* (water canal)

d) Place of old memories

e) At a relative's home

Plate #13
Streets of memories
(Khorrami, 2007)

melted snow and rain somewhere far away to be refined or as wastewater.

The house where I lived before I moved abroad had now been built into a three-story condo. The only things that were left of that house that I recognized were two big spruce trees outside of the condo. It was a home above the ground (see Plate # 14, a). There were few houses that stayed untouched and kept their old façade. I walked to the creek behind our old house and sat on a lone rock (see Plate #14, e) remembering the time when I could hear the sound of the water from my tiny room in the attic, through a vintage steel window hugging a vine that stretched itself to the porous hard cement and reached my window. Some nights, through that same window I could even see the moon's inviting luminous and mysterious presence. Coincidently, in Canada, I also live near a creek. I do not hear the water from my window but in the summertime I walk to the creek and sit by the water. I listen again to the mesmerizing sound that is so reminiscent of my life history, even though my Canadian home is in another land far away from the place where my roots are.

a) Home above the ground

b) Near the last place I lived

c) Neighbourhood shops

d) The bakery

e) Sat on rock by creek

Plate # 14
Reminiscing
(Khorrami, 2007)

I photographed and video taped every angle of the location to preserve the moment as my future reference (see Plate #14, a-e). This photographic referent, as Barthes (1980, p.28) describes, is a reminder of death and also an invitation to sentimentality and it bears double meanings of reality and of the past. That what had been there was certain, but it is not there anymore. It is only be the memory that will be kept alive. Bourdieu (1996, p.19) describes photography as a medium that captures the moment, symbolizes it and transforms the 'good moments' into 'good memories.' Like Bourdieu, Sontag (1979) notes the relation between the past and photography and states photography offers instant romanticism about the present and "photographs turn the past into an object of tender regard, scrambling moral distinctions and disarming historical judgments by the generalized pathos of looking at time past" (p.37).

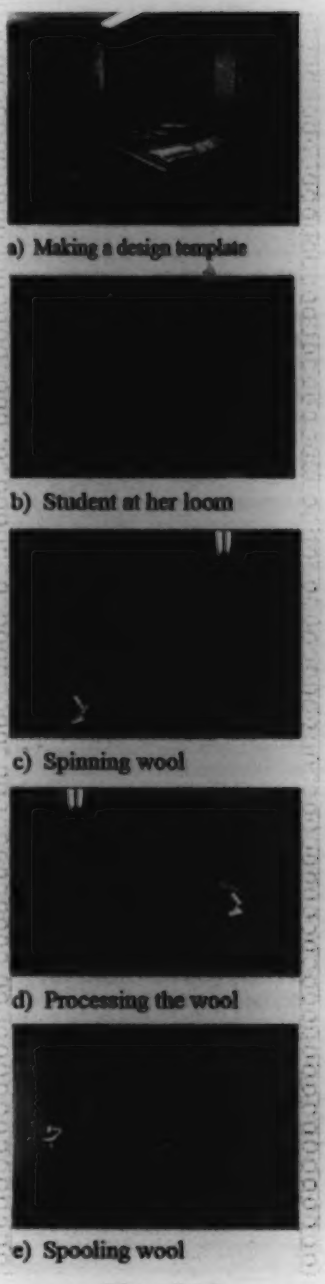


Plate # 15
Carpet weaving school
(Khorrami, 2007)

Finding a Carpet-Weaving Family

My sister had already recruited a few families through a carpet-weaving school in Tehran. My first task was to visit the school and get information about

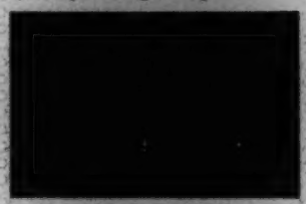
the recruited families. I took my camera to document the trip. My sister and I went to the school and I met with Mrs. Mostajeb who taught carpet-weaving to the students. The staff expected me and they welcomed me there and were willing to help me. Mrs. Mostajeb was a petite, pleasant and informative person who wore a knee-length black cotton jacket with dark trousers showing underneath and her hair was covered with a white scarf. She spoke softly but with confidence. She took me on a tour of the school. One section was dedicated to weaving and there were about thirty looms of various sizes. Women of all ages were behind their looms learning how to weave. The second floor was dedicated to wool dyeing, carpet design and spinning (see Plates #15 and #16, a-e). After about an hour and half visiting, I got the name and place of my contact in Qom.

My second task was to obtain the ethics protocols signed by authorities from the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Information so I could start my research. Contacts and phone calls were made and after about a week, I was granted permission to do my research. In return my sister acted as my guarantor. I

a) Dyeing wool

b) Using synthetic dyes

c) Carpet design templates



d) Bottles of carpet dye

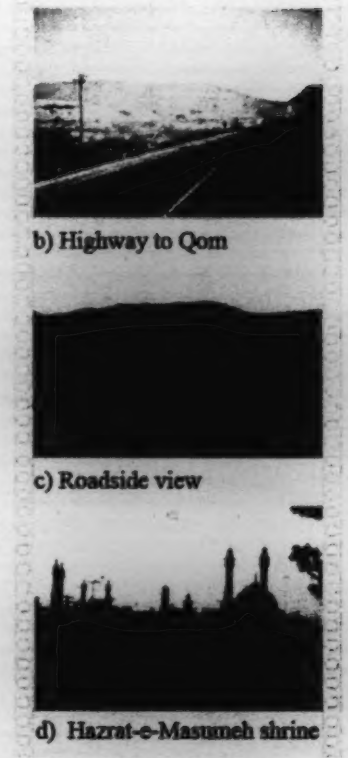
e) Color swatches

Plate # 16
The dyeing process
(Khorrami, 2007)

signed a prewritten letter that my research would not be of any political nature. Gaining the trust of authorities in situations like mine is very difficult. Although I am still an Iranian citizen, coming from abroad creates suspicion and mistrust. I am reminded of Minh-Ha's comments:

> As a minority woman, *I*...As an Iranian–Canadian woman, *I*...As a woman-of-color artist, *I* ... *I* ...Not foreigner, yet foreign. At times rejected by her own community, other times needfully retrieved, she is both useless and useful. This shuttling in-between frontiers is a working out of and an appeal to another sensibility, another consciousness of the condition of marginality" (1991, p.18).

After completing the Iranian government protocols and meeting the requirements of my educational institution, I finally prepared to begin my journey to Qom.



b) Highway to Qom

c) Roadside view

d) Hazrat-e-Masumeh shrine

Plate # 17
Road to Qom
(Khorrami, 2007)

Trip to Qom: Tradition Meets Modernity

Prior to my departure to Qom, I talked by telephone to my contact, Mrs.Tohidi, who had a carpet-weaving workshop in Qom and who was to introduce me to my recruited families. Mrs. Mostajeb was a valuable connection. It was she who had directed me to Mrs. Tohidi. One early morning, my brother-in-law, Shahram, a polite, observant, hard

working and generous sixty-one year old man, took myself, my older sister, Homa, who at sixty years is still a very vibrant and hospitable woman, and the oldest of the three girls in the family to Qom to make my initial visit.

Qom is about 125 kilometers from Tehran (see Plate #17, b-d). Qom is a religious place with a 400 year old *Hazrat-e-Masumeh* shrine. Its marble courtyard is often filled with family groups of Shiite pilgrims from different communities. After the spread of Islam and invasion of Qom by Abu Moosa Ashari, a Moslem leader, the Shiite ideology spread and Qom became a sacred place. Attention and interest given by Western countries to Iranian carpets increased the production of village carpets in Qom and surrounding areas. The history of carpet-weaving in Qom goes back to sometime before World War II. Qom is famous for its fine silk-woven carpets. '*Boteh jegheh*,' '*lachak & torranj*,' '*shah abbasi*,' and '*jangali & chekargahi*' are designs that Qom is famous for (see Plate #18, a-e).

We stopped for coffee in a newly built fast-food complex. It was 45 degrees Celsius and as soon

Plate # 18
Qom carpet designs
(Khorrami, 2007)

as I got out the air-conditioned car into the heat, my first reaction was to laugh. The heat was too much and I couldn't believe it was that hot. We went inside the clean, air-conditioned, modern-looking food court. On one side fast foods were served in a relaxed atmosphere. Scattered around were a few small shops and a specialty coffee shop. On the other side, national Iranian dishes were served in restaurant-like service. What caught my attention more than anything else was hearing the soft easy listening music. Usually, background music in Tehran's restaurants cannot be heard above the crowds of people let alone somewhere near Qom where people go on traditional *'Ziarat'* (pilgrimages). The music was definitely a change from those days when past behaviors were so religiously strict that we as children had to wear a '*chador*' [long veil] (see Plate #19).

Plate #19
***Chador* [long veil]**
(Khorrami, 2007)

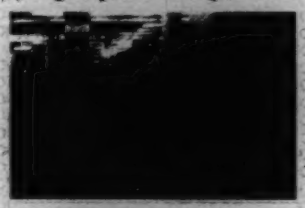
As I was looking outside, I saw a bus stopped in the parking lot and suddenly there were people exiting the bus with bags in their hands. I was very curious. There came a man with a huge golden kettle. Right behind him was another man carrying a cooking stove and a few blankets and small carpets. They

spread their blankets and carpets outside the shady food-court glass windows and started to make breakfast. My sister that saw me puzzled watching those passengers told me that they were '*zavars'* who were on tour to Qom. Here traditional pilgrims sat side-by-side with a modern air conditioned food court (see Plate 20, a-d).

I felt I was traveling a parallel in time along the road that was taking me to my research destination yet to be discovered. This was to be a road full of mystery and sweet surprises. A road of familiar and unfamiliar events and scenarios on different planes where I could move backward and forward remembering a life once lived and a life that is in process. As I was reflecting backward, I remembered weekends or holidays when my family would join friends to go on picnics with children where, upon their arrival, they spread carpets to sit on and prepared lunch and supper. Time has gone by and yet while I watched the '*zavars*', it didn't seem that the tradition of having a good time had changed in its nature. I felt as though my youth and childhood experiences were scattered across the landscape like seeds. My memories were cultivating a

a) Roadside stop

b) Pilgrim picnic near Qom river



c) Modern food court

d) *Zavars* [pilgrims]

Plate #20
Tradition meets modernity
(Khorrami, 2007)

part of me that has lived in many places. The surroundings became a living mirror of many reflections inward and outward, backward and forward, an exploration of my identity.

Mrs. Tohidi: Connecting with the Research Co-participants

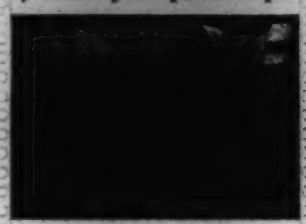
We arrived in Qom around noon and went straight to Mrs.Tohidi's workshop (see Plate #21, a-e). Mrs. Tohidi is an outspoken, informative woman in her fifties who is an *Ostad* [master craftsperson] and runs her own carpet-weaving workshop. She appeared to be connected to a large social network and knew many carpet-weaving families in the vicinity. Her cell phone was ringing all the time at the workshop and while we were in the car traveling to visit different families who would be candidates for my research. She impressed me with her business-like attitude, which contrasted with the religious social structure environment she was living in. Her carpet-weaving workers were having lunch. The smell of bread, fresh basil mixed with the smell of onion and kebab was familiar to me and for a moment I made a journey to the past. The workers

a) Mrs. Tohidi's Workshop

b) Doorway to Workshop

c) Loom inside workshop

d) Partially completed carpet



e) Mrs. Tohidi

Plate # 21
Meeting Mrs. Tohidi
(Khorrami, 2007)

quickly cleaned up and took the rest of their lunch to the small kitchen and got back to their looms.

I was now looking at a scene that I had only read about in the literature review yet here it was right in front of me (see Plate # 22, a-e). I had never seen a workshop like this before and it felt like I was looking at original artwork in a museum. I approached the weavers and talked to them and asked questions. I felt like a sponge wanting to absorb the ever present breathing text sitting right in front of me. I shifted between the text and the image. I took photographs of the weavers and made notes to myself.

It was at Mrs.Tohidi's workshop that I learned that carpet weavers do not weave from their imagination as I was expecting from the literature review. Instead, these present-day weavers, whether they are at the workshop or at home, weave from a design that is provided for them. That was a definite change in perspective for me! "No one weaves from imagination anymore," said Mrs.Tohidi. She said, "No one buys those kinds of carpets." She continued, "If the carpets are not perfect then there is no buyer and these people depend on their weaving income." I

a) Coming to work

b) Preparing Tools

c) On the bench

d) Getting comfortable

e) Busy weaving

Plate # 22
Mrs. Tohidi's workshop
(Khorrami, 2007)

realized that a deep imaginative aspect of the carpet weavers' story had changed over the past thirty years. In response to the international marketplace and from a bazaar culture where creativity, ownership of design and product ascribed value to a "mall culture" where one customer can buy a carpet very similar to another and in which the franchiser owns the design. The individual has become a laborer instead of an artist. Just as the years had changed them, so I realized how much I had changed too. What I had been imagining was only a mirror image. An absent photograph of myself as a child who used to hold hands with her mother and go to the bazaar to shop and see layers of carpets at the merchant's store. As a child I watched people leafing through the piles of rich patterns as if paging through a heavy manuscript, raising dust, which hung in the rays of sun mixed with the aroma of spice piercing the roof of the bazaar. Going to the bazaar was a ritual that evoked a sense of anticipation and excitement (see Plate #23, a-e).

a) Intersection at bazaar

b) Bazaar worker

c) Fabrics in bazaar

d) Sights, sounds and smells

e) Layers of carpets for sale

Plate # 23
Bazaar culture
(Khorammi, 2007)

As I was walking around I noticed a girl wearing a black *chador* whispering into another weaver's ear (see Plate #24, a-e). I later discovered

that the whispering girl was Gohar ('Jewel' in English), a blind weaver who heard us and probably wanted to find out who we were. At Mrs.Tohidi's workshop, I also met Zinat. Both were beautiful young women who worked there regularly. Gohar could only work at Mrs. Tohidi's because special equipment for blind people is provided for her there. This is one of the only places in that locale that provides special facilities for the blind and Mrs. Tohidi has taught Gohar how to weave. Zinat works here as well as at home where she helps her brothers weave.

Mrs. Tohidi told me that she is a member of the carpet-weaving co-op. "It is very hard for individual carpet weavers to get a contract without being a member of the co-op," said Mrs. Tohidi. Most of her workers are young women, either married or single and still living at home, who do not have the capital to be on their own and they come to work for Mrs.Tohidi. Some of them, like Zinat and her sister, who live in Abu Zeyd Abad village, travel by bus to work at the workshop. Mrs. Tohidi pays a membership fee that enables her to get a discount on her material and she also receives her orders through the co-op and sells her

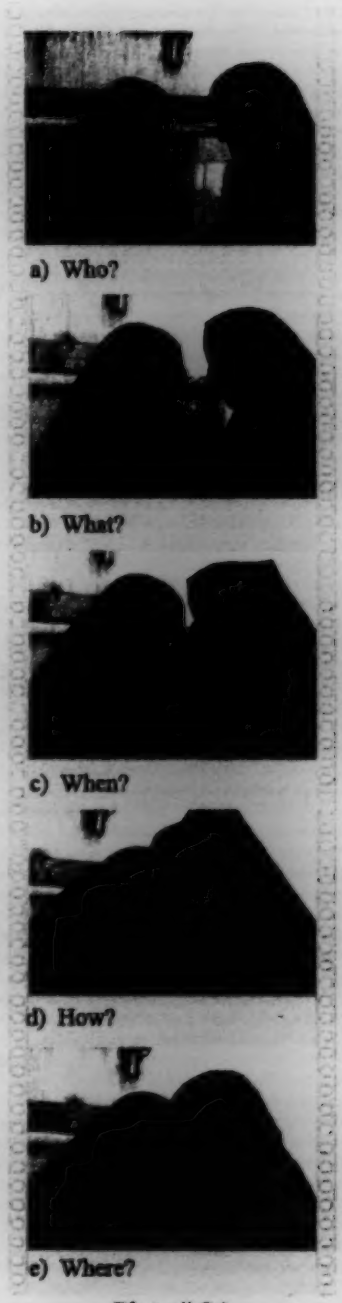
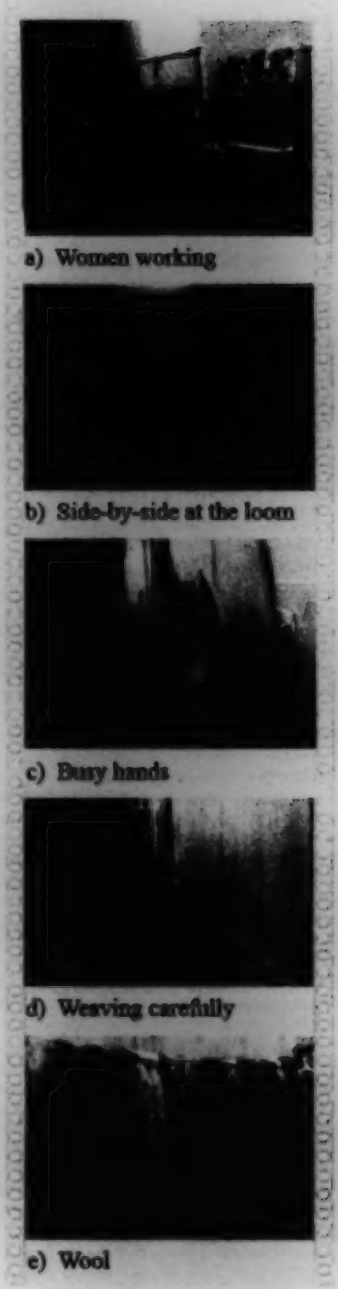


Plate # 24
Whispering
(Khorammi, 2007)

carpets to the co-op. She runs her business out of her own house. She also has another house in the village where she spends the weekends. She lives on the main floor and the workshop is in the basement.

The basement is divided into three rooms: a large room where looms are located (see Plate #25, a-e), a kitchen and another small furnished room layered with carpets of all sorts that serves as an office for her. In the corner of the room, she has a cabinet where she keeps her co-op membership certificate. She told me that when she gets a contract from the co-op, she divides the work between her workers. She always has steady workers. Sometimes she gets new workers and she tests them to see how good they are and if they pass their test they are hired. She pays her workers weekly. The faster they weave the more money they get (weavers receive 5 rials or approximately 2 cents per knot, depending on how many rows they weave per day). She profits by getting cheap labour and material. I asked her how she judged the quality of the work of her new workers when she employs them and she said, "Just by watching how they handle tools I can tell if they are good or not." She said that weavers have to



a) Women working

b) Side-by-side at the loom

c) Busy hands

d) Weaving carefully

e) Wool

Plate # 25
Learning about the weavers
(Khorrami, 2007)

be creative and have the talent for weaving. She said that sometimes a young weaver could be better than an experienced old weaver. When I asked what she meant by creativity, she explained creativity as an inner talent that some possess and some don't. "Most people can weave if trained, but some have golden fingers and are very intuitive."

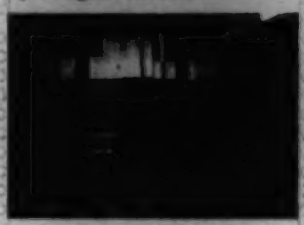
After a few hours conversing and exploring at Mrs.Tohidi's workshop, we drove with Mrs.Tohidi to Zinat's house to meet with her family in Abu Zeyd Abad village (see Plate #26, a-d). I met with the family and explained the nature and purpose of my research and asked them if they were willing to participate. At the time the father was sleeping so out of respect I asked the family to talk to him to see if he would agree to their participation. In total there were eight people in the household. I left asking Badri, Zinat's mother, to let Mrs. Tohidi know within a few days what the decision would be.

Mrs.Tohidi took me to a few other carpet-weaving families in the area so I could locate other families as backup in case of withdrawal by my recruited family or by myself for reasons that were not

a) Village atmosphere

b) Backdoor to weaving family

c) Neighbourhood



d) A weaver's home

Plate # 26
Abu Zeyd Abad village
(Khorrami, 2007)

predicted at initial contact. We spent the whole day going to different villages and families. Later that day we met with Mrs. Mostajeb who was my initial contact through the carpet-weaving school in Tehran, at her mother's house in Abu Zeyd Abad and had tea and fruit. She happened to be there for a personal reason at the same time that we were there. Her mother was also weaving and had one loom in the kitchen and another one in the narrow hallway of their house (see Plate #27, a-b). There were a mix of men and women sitting around the room with Mrs. Mostajeb's mother and aunt sitting by the *samovar* (see Plate # 27, c) and serving tea. Mrs. Mostajeb was very helpful and after spending about half an hour at her mother's house she took us to another family and introduced us to them. Most of the families we met were willing to participate. The grandmothers of a few families we met had died so Zinat's family best met my criteria of finding intergenerational knowledge and stories. Her family included her sisters and brothers ranging from twelve to twenty years old, her stepmother and her grandmother. I was sincerely hoping to hear from them.

a) Loom in the kitchen

b) Loom in the hallway

c) *Samavar* [boils water]

Plate # 27
At Mrs. Mostajeb's mother's
(Khorrami, 2007)

Protocols and Tradition

It is traditional in Iran to be served tea, sweets and fruits and sometimes even lunch and dinner when visiting a family. People are very generous and hospitable and no one will leave a house hungry. This was the case for us. Everywhere we went there was tea and watermelon, or a prepared lunch. Due to the time spent building relationships and following local protocols the time passed quickly and soon we had to return to Tehran.

A few days later, Mrs. Tohidi called me and said that Zinat's father would like us to visit him to discuss the project in detail. One of the cultural protocols necessary in Iran requires always contacting the head male of an Iranian family concerning any business interactions. We made another trip to the village to meet with Abdol, the father (see Plate #28). I asked my brother-in-law who had accompanied me on this trip to initiate the introduction and establish a respected rapport because Iranian family structure is still patriarchal in nature and the trust could be gained easier through man-to-man talk. After the initiation

Plate #28
Meeting Abdol's family
(Khorrami, 2007)

protocols, it was then more comfortable to discuss the project and get Abdol's permission. He agreed that his family would participate in the research.

I then asked his wife to introduce me to her mother. Her mother lived in another part of the village. She agreed and took us there, where she introduced me to her mother, Omolbani who is 69 years old and has woven carpets all her life. She is now retired. Her father, Ali-Akbar, ran a small store adjacent to their house. While I was explaining the project to Omolbani, my brother-in-law was talking to Ali-Akbar and explaining the project to him. They both agreed that Omolbani could participate in the project. We made arrangements for a day that was convenient for everyone to be interviewed.

I traveled to Abu Zeyd Abad four times (see Plate #29, a-c). Each time I interviewed each family member separately for an hour at their house. The unfolding negotiating nature of this study did not utilize structured or predetermined questions. However, the direction of the interviews was guided by overarching research questions that included the individual's background information, social

a) Dusk in Abu Zeyd Abad

b) An evening moment

c) Moment interrupted

Plate # 29
Leaving the village at night
(Khorrami, 2007)

relationships in their public and private space and carpet as a metaphor in relation to individual's identity. The consent forms for interviews and photography were thoroughly explained to the participants and each participant was allowed time to review the forms again. The participants were informed of their right not to participate and their right to opt out at any time during the research period. The participants were also assured of the confidentiality of the information and their identity either in visual photographs or their real name. They were given pseudonyms throughout the texts. The forms were all signed. Each time I met with the family I read each participant the transcripts of their conversations to confirm the accuracy of the information (see Plate #30).

Plate # 30
Protocols to gain entry
(Khorrami, 2007)

Although I wanted to conduct a family discussion circle, it was not possible because of the family's relationship with the head of the family. They did not want to sit in the family circle and discuss family matters. The father and the hierarchy structure could perhaps prevent family members from talking openly so I abandoned that idea. Instead, I gathered the siblings together once and another time with their

mother to verify or clarify uncertainties. Although Abdol (the father) was not the main focus of this research, he was the head of the family and so had a strong influence in the family relationships. He was interviewed once for an hour.

Abdol and his Family

The carpet-weaving family (see Plate #31, a-d) that is the focus of this study consists of eight people - parents and six children (see *Figure 3*). The parents and the children are all carpet weavers. The mother, Badri is 43 years old. The father, Abdol is 54 years old and has married twice. As is the custom for Iranian men, he was wearing a pajama and a t-shirt. His hair is turning white and he looked very intense and fiery in nature. He told me that when he married his first wife, he held different menial jobs such as fruit picker and construction labourer. When he married his second wife because of rural migration to the cities and lack of work in the village he turned to carpet-weaving. He lost his first wife from an explosion that occurred while she was bathing the children. He has two sons, Pirouz who is 19 and Babak who is 16 and two

a) Badri and Omolbani

b) Babak, Marzieh and Pirouz

c) Gohar

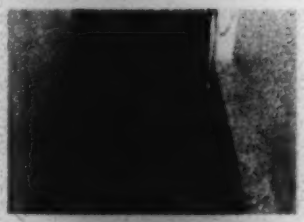
d) Zinat

Plate #31
Abdol's family
(Khorrami, 2007)

daughters. Zinat is 20 and Parvaneh is 18 from his first wife. He has two daughters, Gohar who is 15 and Marzieh who is 12 from his second wife, Badri.

They live in a small modest house. The parents occupy the main floor, which they share with the youngest girl, Marzieh. The rest of the family resides in a one room basement (see Plate #32, a-e). There is a loom in the multi purpose room on the main floor for Badri and her husband. In this room they sleep and sometimes watch the TV, which is tucked in the corner of the room. In the basement, there are three looms of various sizes. The biggest loom is used by Pirouz and Babak. The two small ones are used by Zinat and Parvaneh, a daughter whom I never met. The five siblings also sleep here. The size of the looms is dependent on the size of the carpet in production. The looms are constructed by a village loom construction expert. All the looms in Abdol's house are of the upright vertical type. There is a small front yard decorated with few geranium pots and an outhouse in the corner. Adjacent to the house is a small lot where

a) Abdol's House



b) Basement doorway

c) Bedding

d) More bedding

e) Basement room

Plate # 32
Basement
(Khorrami, 2007)

the family keeps a few chicken and roosters and a hand-made *tanoor* (outdoor bread oven). The youngest girl sometimes plays with her cousins on the lot outside.

As I absorbed the ambience of the field, I prepared myself to become more engaged with the women's lives in 'Abdol's family.' I recalled my long journey from Canada to Abu Zeyd Abad, a small village outside of Qom and recognized the journey was zooming in on one family whose head male had graciously allowed me to observe, tape record and photograph their lives. The figure on the following page illustrates the women and children included in the research study in 'Abdol's family' lineage.

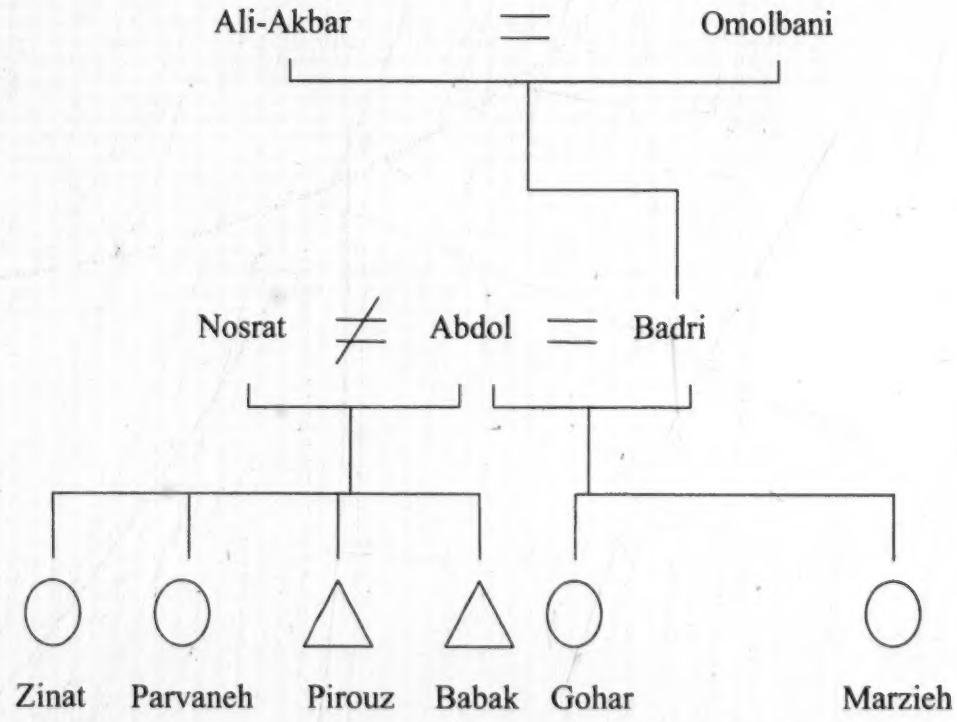


Figure 3. Genealogical chart of women and children in Abdol's house

CHAPTER FIVE

Through the Zoom Lens: Close-up Conversations and Selected Episodes including Theory, Reflections and Narrative Accounts

Chapter is a narrative account of a home-based family carpet-weaving operation in rural Iran. Through narrative inquiry I explore: 1) the nature of the family unit as a producer of carpets in a home-based cottage industry in Abu Zeyd Abad village; 2) the experiences of three generations of women carpet weavers as the primary preservers of history and culture through carpet as an artifact; 3) the role of these women as contributors to the informal household economy; and 4) carpet as material culture, as a repository for tradition, heritage, story and artistry that has been handed down through the generations.

In the beginning of this chapter, I will discuss the historical and contextual background of carpet-weaving which includes the systems of production that apply to the family in the study. I also include overviews of the history of weaving, types of Iranian looms, and a description of carpet knotting types to create context for the four sections above. The historical and contextual background sets the stage for the narrative re-presentations of the family members. A genealogical chart explains the position of each member's kinship lineage. Researcher photographs and videotaped excerpts of the journey interact with the photographs each family member took to provide a complimentary visual narrative re-presentation.

Historical and Contextual Background

Systems of Production

As discussed in chapter two, there are two different systems of carpet production: the putting-out system and the independent production system. Under the putting-out system, there are two types of subcontracts: horizontal and vertical. Under horizontal subcontracts the merchant and the weavers agree to the production plan without the merchant providing the raw material. Under vertical subcontracts the merchant provides the raw material to the weavers at home.

The putting-out system dealt with in this study utilizes vertical subcontracting. This means that the design, size and other specification instructions are given to the carpet-weaving co-op by the merchant through a middleman. Under this system, weavers have less control of the design and choice of materials than in the independent system. Women are confined to their homes and are isolated from other women and social activity and therefore they have very little contact with people outside of their family. Women rarely have direct contact with the merchants who are located in the major trading centers such as bazaars. Contracts are arranged between the merchants and male members of the family, which is mediated by a middleman. Rural women's concentration on carpet production and home-making prevents them from undertaking outside paid work such as domestic servants. In order to fulfill their family commitments and earn cash income by weaving they spend most of their time in the home.

The putting-out weavers earn their wages through contractual arrangements based on a piece rate which is divided into several payments. The contractual amount is determined according to the size and complexity of the carpet. Usually the first payment

is an advance of approximately ten percent of the total contract. The rest of the money is paid at various stages of progress, and the last payment is paid upon the completion of the carpet. Some weavers ask for cash advances to support their family. In most cases, cash advances result in weavers owing additional labor time to the merchants when the carpet is finished. The time owed to the merchant is carried over into the next contract, which puts the weavers into indebtedness that constantly repeats itself. The low level of income and lack of education of the women and the increasingly high inflation, as well as rising unemployment, leave the weavers with no alternative but home-production of carpets under exploitative conditions (Ghvamshahidi, 1995, p.145). "The carpet-weaving industry as an informal economy seems to operate on a tight network of manipulation and intimidation of the workers as a dynamic device of production relations" (p.145). When the carpet is finished, the local merchant or the middleman transfers it for cleaning and finishing to their workshops and later to the trading centers where it is sold on the local and international markets (see Plates #33 and #34, a-d).

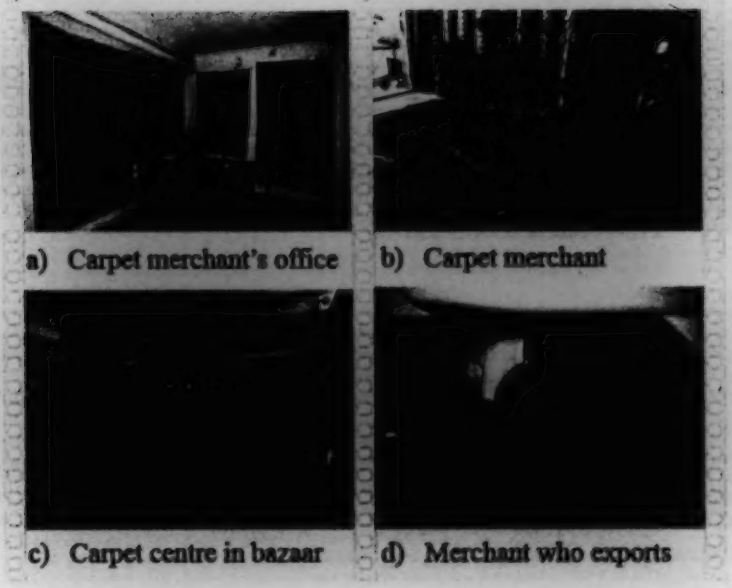


Plate #33 Carpet merchants in bazaar trading center (Khorrami, 2007).

Plate #34 Buying and selling in the bazaar (Khorrami, 2007).

Weaving

Weaving began in the Upper Paleolithic era, 20,000 to 10,000 years ago. Early man made clothes by sewing together skins with bone needles and animal sinew. The idea of weaving preceded the loom by many thousands of years (Broudy, 1979). He/she was inspired by nature such as spider cobwebs, caterpillars as they wove cocoons and used elements of nature for weaving (pp.9-10). It is thought that weaving developed out of basket and mat making. History shows that carpets have been woven and traded since ancient times. The history of the handmade carpet making started in the fourth century B.C. An early Pazyrk Carpet was discovered in 1949 frozen inside a burial mound in Siberia and was dated to be woven in the Caucasus area.

Weaving is the process of interlacing one set of threads, the warp, with another set, the weft, which is inserted at right angles to the warp. The loom is the means of keeping the warp threads under tension in parallel order (Hecht, 2001, p.9). The structures of looms evolved with each new discovery of raw materials and needs within each culture. Horizontal looms were the first looms used with elements of natural materials such as flax, wool, cotton and silk for weaving. Vertical looms were developed to meet the demand of more sophisticated styles of weaving and the increase of the production in different countries. The idea of weaving came about at the same time in each culture, but each culture had its own method of utilizing the loom. Some cultures used horizontal looms, some used vertical and others used a combination of the both. Broudy states "the principles, the tools, even the language of weaving have acquired by their fundamental importance symbolic and metaphoric value in our lives" (p.7). He goes on to say that in China, the warp that is tightly fastened to the loom symbolizes the

enduring forces of the universe. While the weft moves back and forth, underneath the surface of the carpet and rising up again, symbolizes the fleeting life of man. Hecht further states, "In India the warp represents eternal existence and the weft symbolizes the stages of an individual's life" (p.7). The looms also have a symbolic meaning in some cultures and are passed down from generation to generation as heirlooms of family legacy. Throughout the Middle East, carpets are viewed not only as objects of daily life but as forms of savings. Carpets are often collected by families and kept in a special bank vault. These carpets can be sold if money is needed (Oriental rugs and kilims, 2007).

Iranian Looms

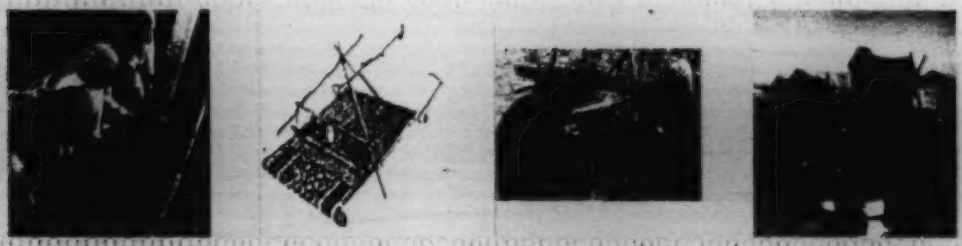
The family in this study most frequently uses vertical looms as opposed to horizontal looms. Horizontal looms lie above the ground on stakes or sidepieces and are small in comparison to vertical looms. Horizontal looms are mostly used by nomadic tribes (see Plate #35). Vertical looms which are more common in Iranian villages and workshops, are more complicated than horizontal looms (see Plate #36). A vertical loom frame is constructed in a standing position and the carpet weaver sits on an adjustable plank facing the loom. As the carpet increases in height the plank is adjusted to sit higher and enable the weaver easy access. Warp threads run from top to bottom of the loom frame and form the fringes at the end of the carpet. Weft threads run across the width of the loom. Warp and weft threads are usually cotton. Coded skeins of colorful wool, silk or cotton are organized on the top of the loom for use as weft threads. One thread of yarn is pulled down from the yarns lined across the top of the loom. The thread is knotted

onto one (senneh) or two (ghiordes) weft threads and then is cut with a knife (see Plate #37). Once the carpet weaver has knotted the yarn to the warp threads across a few rows, she/he then uses a comb-like instrument to press the weft threads against the previous row and brush the pile downward. The carpet weaver's pressure and the closeness of the knots are described as the warp tension. The closely knotted fibers create the carpet's pile and the colors chosen follow a design or template.

The height and thickness of the pile, the designs, the materials, the weft tension and the type of knot were once all determined according to local and family custom. In most Persian carpets the weaver uses two wefts for every warp which produces a finer carpet but traditional tribal carpet weavers may use only one weft. The number of knots per square meter indicates the quality of the carpet. More knots highlight the patterns in the carpet. The carpet designs are drawn by artists and often supplied by the merchant. The design templates illustrate the placement of each knot on graph paper and ensure accuracy and symmetry.

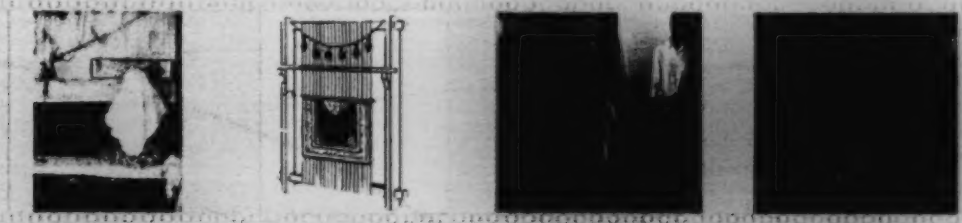
After the carpet is woven arrangements are made for the carpet to be picked up by the middleman for shearing and washing. There are many people involved in the production of an Iranian carpet. Specialized people dye the fibers, spin the yarns, build the looms, shear the pile and repair any flaws. Still others wash the carpet to ready it for market. The following plates illustrate vertical and horizontal looms, weaving techniques and knotting styles (Plates #35-38, a-d and plate #39). Worn carpets have a reduced pile, which gives a better view of the design. "Years ago, in Iran to make a carpet look old and to eliminate its raw and sharp colors, it was the custom to spread carpets in the streets and markets so as to be walked on by the passers by or the carpets were spread under the sun

and washed with water to which '*chubak*' a kind of soapy root ashes which contain alkaline were added" (Rugman, 2007).



a) Ghashghaie tribe in Iran b) Horizontal loom c) Iranian nomads weaving d) Loom in normad camp

Plate # 35 Horizontal loom used by Iranian tribes (Khorrami, 2007).



a) Woman at vertical loom b) Vertical loom c) Household vertical loom d) Child learns weaving

Plate # 36 Collection of images of carpet weavers using a vertical loom (Khorrami, 2007).

a) Mender b) Expert hands c) Carpet to be mended d) Mending tools

Plate # 37 Carpet mending (Khorrami, 2007).

a) Carpets drying on roof b) Dyed wool drying c) Girl learning to design d) Spinning dyed wool

Plate # 38 Carpet processors (Khorrami, 2007).

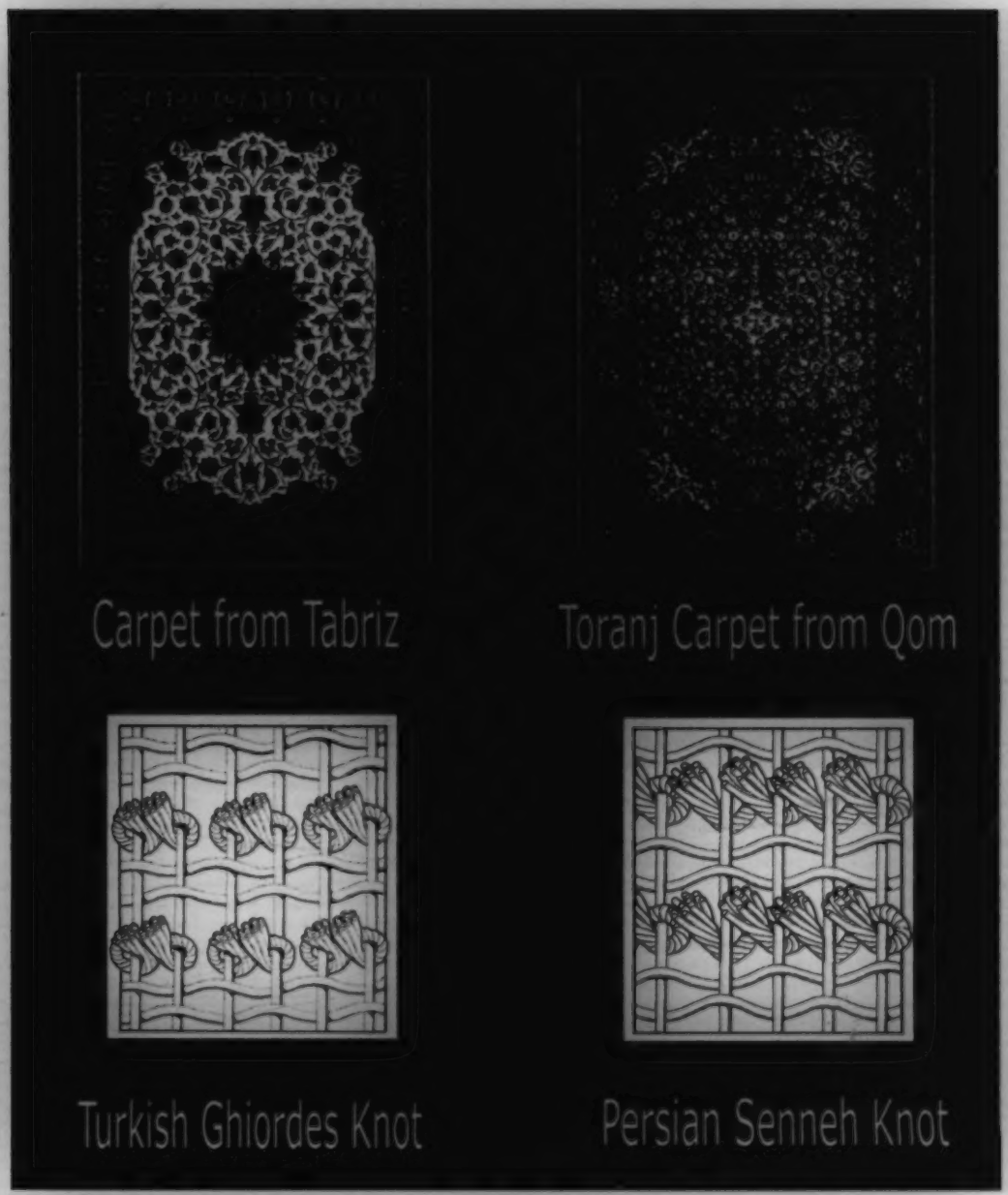


Plate # 39 Examples of carpets using different knots (Khorrami, 2007).
(Pak Persian Rugs, 2007; Knots of Rugs and Carpets, 2007)

Coming to Know Lives through Stories

I chose narrative inquiry in combination with photography (visual narratives) as the way to collect field text (data), stories from three generations of women in a carpet-weaving family. As noted in Chapter three, I used both interviews and photography as ways to collect data. Photography captures special aspects of daily living, which is not possible for both the researcher and the participants to communicate otherwise. I had one Polaroid ONE600 Classic Instant camera, which is a basic model that is great for family and special occasion use. I left it with the family after my second visit. Zinat, Badri, Pirouz and Babak each took photographs of their daily lives and the things that they enjoyed. In this chapter the photographs they took are included after the written version of their stories.

Narrative Re-presentations

Just as in weaving, braiding is the process of "mingling together in writing of various aspects of thinking—of perception and conscious thought, of description and analysis, of what is seen and what is imagined" (Ely, et al., 1997, p.106). In this study, the narrative accounts of each family member are braided with my reflections and thoughts from my journaling after the interviews. Photographs of the research experiences are positioned down the right hand side. Three components: my reflections, the carpet weavers' individual stories, and the photographs, are braided together throughout chapter five. The narrative accounts of each family member, which have been translated from the Farsi language to English, are indented and single-spaced to set their words apart from my thoughts and text which is written in italics and double spaced.

Although this research project focused on Iranian women carpet weavers, two teenage males, Pirouz and Babak, were also included in the interviews because they were members of the family actively involved as weavers in the family business. The two boys, along with Zinat, are children from Abdol's first marriage. The interviews also included Gohar, one of the two daughters of his second wife. Marzieh, the youngest daughter, was only 12 years old at the time and the prerequisite for my inclusion in my research as a co-participant that person must have 5 years of weaving experience and consequently Marzieh was not interviewed. Abdol's interview informs my analysis but is not included because of political comments he made and my concern and obligation for the safety of my sister and her family. Badri, the mother of Gohar and Marzieh, provided an insightful intergenerational interview and became an invaluable connection to the grandmother, Omolbani, who provided me with my last interview.

Parvaneh: A Narrative of Absence

Throughout the research experience, Zinat's sister, Parvaneh was never available or around when I met with the family. Although I never met with Parvaneh, I felt her presence (see plate #40). In the corner of the room, I saw her loom with a half woven silk carpet. The figurative designs were taking shape across the bottom (see plate #41). I also saw another two-sided silk carpet which was woven on one side by Parvaneh and on the other side by Zinat. The mystery surrounding her absence puzzled me. Finally, confidentially, it was explained that in the past Parvaneh's father had a drug addiction and Parvaneh was the go-between. When Mrs. Tohidi, the carpet-weaving workshop owner, found out about this she hired her to work at the workshop to pull her away from that lifestyle. Was Parvanh's absence a deliberate avoidance behavior? Was she afraid that I would discover this activity? Was she afraid her father would punish her if she disclosed private information? These were questions for which I was unable to find answers. I wondered whether Parvaneh was able to manipulate

Plate # 40
Parvaneh
(Khorrami, 2007)

Plate # 41
Parvaneh's loom
(Khorrami, 2007)

her relationship with her father because of what she did as a courier for him. Did she use this power to her advantage? I noticed that she had asked her father to build her a closet in her parents' room. The fact that he built her a closet is not something the other children could or would ask for. When I first met with the family, I heard about Parvaneh. Her mother explained that she was engaged and soon to be married. Yet, I did not see any dowry items. Why she did not have an obvious dowry? Was she, like her stepmother Badri, who also rebelled against what was expected when stood up to the *ostad* in her youth?

Narrative Account of Zinat

I met Zinat at Mrs. Tohidi's workshop where women and young girls came to weave carpets. Mrs. Tohidi is an *ostad* and a member of the weaver's co-op. She operates her own workshop and hires weavers on a contract basis. Zinat and her stepsister, Gohar weave at Mrs. Tohidi's workshop. Zinat's primary job is carpet-weaving in her family's home. While her family is waiting for a new carpet contract, Zinat uses that time to weave at Mrs. Tohidi's workshop on a part-time basis. She is a petite, slender and soft spoken girl who looked to be in her early twenties (see Plate #42). She is quiet and shy at first glance, but was eager to engage in conversation. Zinat is one of Mrs.

Plate # 42
Zinat beside her brother
(Khorrami, 2007)

Tohidi's carpet weaver/contract workers. Meeting Zinat before I began my research was a helpful connection because it made further contact with the family more comfortable and my presence more acceptable.

On my second meeting with the family, my brother-in-law and Abdol visited in the yard. I went inside and found a little seclusion by using the parents' main floor living room for my interviews. Zinat was working at home and joined me. She is the oldest of her siblings (see Plate #43, a-d). I asked her to describe her family. She said,

> We are two sisters and two brothers [*she excludes her other two half sisters*] and we all weave carpet. We all had to quit school to weave in order to make a living. We would have liked to go to school and get education, but it wasn't possible to attend school, do homework, prepare for exams and weave carpet. My schooling is only up to grade two. Parvaneh only finished her third grade.
>
> My other sister, Gohar [*half sisters Gohar and Marzieh now included*], didn't attend school because she was born half blind and there was not any facility for blind people in the village.
>
> My younger sister, Marzieh is in grade three and she says she wants to become a teacher. When we were kids we wanted to become somebody, but those thoughts were just dreams.

a) Basement room

b) Babak, Marzieh and Pirouz

c) Babak and Pirouz

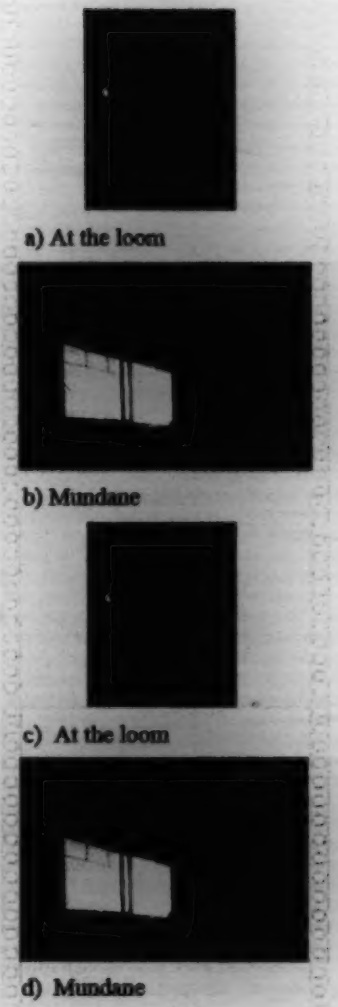
d) Half sister Gohar

Plate # 43
Zinat's siblings
(Khorrami, 2007)

Zinat complained of bad eyesight from the carpet-weaving and she described her carpet-weaving routine at home as follows:

> Well, five of us (sisters and brothers) sleep here in the basement around the looms. We usually get up early around 5 am or 6 am for prayer and then we start weaving. We eat something for breakfast and then sit behind the looms and weave until lunch time. At lunch we eat and return to our looms and weave more until 9 pm when we retire for the day. Some times we go upstairs and watch T.V. Every day is the same.

Earning money at Mrs.Tohidi's workshop gives Zinat a measure of an economic independence. Also, with her earnings she probably is able to help her family financially. This is in keeping with Ghvamshahidi (1995, p.14). He states that "the income generated from carpet-weaving at home goes directly to household expenses, and the women are left with little or no money for themselves." At the same time, Zinat is able to temporarily put herself outside her mundane, everyday life at home (see Plate #44, a-d). *Working at Mrs.Tohidid's workshop provides Zinat not only with an income but also with an opportunity to socialize. Having a social life was a point that some women piece workers in the literature review claimed*



a) At the loom

b) Mundane

c) At the loom

d) Mundane

Plate # 44
Everyday is the same
(Khorrami, 2007)

to be an advantage to workshop weaving. They made comments such as, "I have no one to talk to" or "I have no moral support from my family" (Ghvamshahidi, 1995, p.145) *or "I prefer working in the factory [workshop] because I can socialize with other women and I am recognized and paid as [an] individual worker"* (Hareven, 2002, p.95).

Zinat's tone provides echoes that underscore a reoccurring dreary, mundane existence. I resonated with Zinat's narrative because I had felt the same in my adopted land, far away from family interaction, when I immigrated to Canada. I think of my existence as a cocooned life and I wondered what was missing in their lives (see Plate #45, a-d). *This feeling reminded me of a movie entitled "Distant" (Ceylan, 2004). In the movie the character lived in a cold mundane and depressing room. He was a photographer who had moved to the city years before and had clung to obsessive routines of city life and his solitary existence. He had become very self-centered, possessive and protective of his material world. He had lost touch with his inner self by being displaced to another environment. One day, a relative from his home village*

a) At the loom

b) Mundane

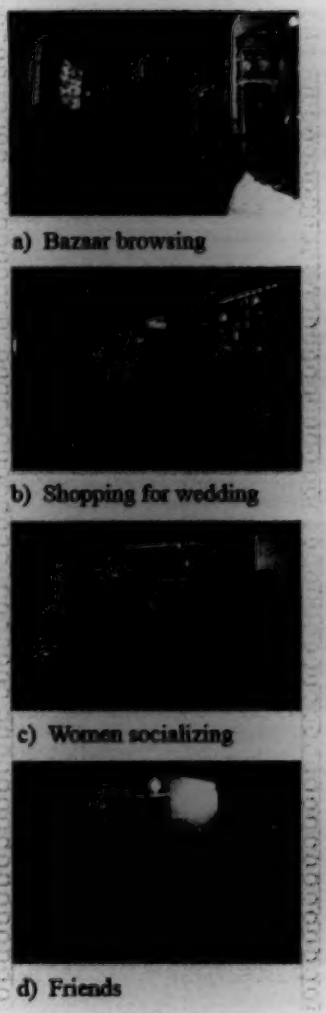
c) At the loom

d) Mundane

Plate # 45
Mundane existence
(Khorrami, 2007)

came to stay with him to find a job. The two men struggled to make a connection. Communication was slowly reduced to a bare minimum. These two personalities clashed. The main character had changed so much that his relative from the village and he could no longer relate to each other. The main character had lost his imagination.

I thought about the parallel between the main character and carpet weavers who no longer seemed inspired because of the way circumstances had changed around them. They are weaving for necessity rather than artistry. The cocooned, isolated life of village carpet weavers and those characters in the film resemble my existence, being removed from the close knit family relations when I moved to Canada. In Canada I am in a distant place where everyday life becomes a mundane, solitary existence where only my birds give me hope. I turned my thoughts to Zinat and her answers to my questions.



a) Bazaar browsing

b) Shopping for wedding

c) Women socializing

d) Friends

Plate # 46
Kashan bazaar
(Khorrami, 2007)

Zinat continued.

> Sometimes when the contract my father gets is not big, I go to Mrs.Tohidi's workshop to weave. It is a long way to travel but I earn some money and I can socialize with other women. I have one girlfriend and sometimes in between

contracts when I have more time we take the bus and go to Kashan's bazaar and I buy stuff for my dowry with the money I've saved. I am recently engaged and soon to be married (see Plate # 46, a-d).

Zinat's dowry (see Plate #47) *is piled in boxes, wrapped in plastic and covered with a cloth and stored in the corner of the basement room where they all must live, eat, weave and sleep together. She has been collecting items for her dowry for years. I remember an old Iranian phrase that a girl belongs to a stranger meaning that a girl needs the financial, physical, and emotional protection of her father and brothers, and then will be given away to marry a stranger. A large number of marriages in rural areas, and some urban areas, especially among low and lower middle classes, are still arranged, and girls do not have much say in the matter (Ghvamshahidi, p.137). Zinat is merely visiting her parent's home until she establishes her own home.*

Plate # 47
Zinat's dowry
(Khorrami, 2007)

Perhaps buying the dowry items with her own money gives her an identity and makes her feel sovereign and worthy. I wonder whether or not she will ever be recognized for who she really is - not just a wife or mother, but as a talented carpet weaver who

brings beauty into the world through her work. Her identity is woven into the carpet which makes her inseparable from her work. I thought it is as if she does not have a dream of her own or as if she does not belong to the wider society because the world does not recognize her existence. Even though she lives in her birthplace and in her father's home, she focuses on escaping to find her own home. When her mother died, she became the matriarch of Abdol's house until he remarried. Once Abdol remarried she was displaced by his new wife who became the matriarchal authority in the household. Now, she is an alien visitor in her father's home which is compounded by the patriarchal society that requires women to find a male provider. Just like me, I became displaced when I left Iran. Now, on my return visit, I am an outsider inside my birthplace and an outsider inside my adopted land. Identities blur when crossing the boundaries of these different geographical landscapes, here and there, a walking shadow (see Plate # 48).

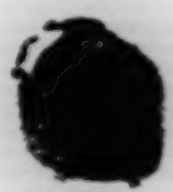


Plate # 48
Identities blur
(Khorrami, 2007)

Zinat talked about getting married as if marriage is the doorway to a better life and her survival - a place she could call home and where she

could claim her independence. I wondered if married life would bring her the imagined home or if it would be any different or better than where she was now? Will she ever do things differently from what she is doing now? Marriage is a dream for Zinat who has been confined to one room day and night except when she goes to Mrs. Tohidi's workshop where she can socialize. She can take her memories along with her to the loom and frame them on the wall. A wall where yet another loom is erected. No matter what, she will never be separated from her imagination (see Plate #49).

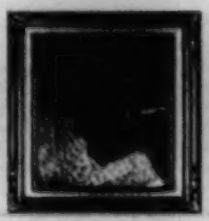


Plate # 49
Framed memories
(Khorrami, 2007)

Methods of weaving are family secrets, handed down from generation to generation. It is at the mother's side that children learn to weave in a certain way and with a certain tension. Zinat learned to weave at her mother's side. Tension in weaving is important so that a carpet stays square to the end. The warp thread is held under a tension to enable the weaver to lift up the thread.

a) Braided Identity

b) Levels of tension

Plate # 50
Intermingled
(Khorrami, (2007)

Levels of tension in both my life and those of the weavers intermingle like the braid of a young girl waiting to be a woman (see Plate # 50). *There are*

levels of tension weaving through Zinat's life as she prepares to start her own family. Even though the loss of her mother was evident in Zinat's lonely demeanor, she never spoke of the incident. I sensed a distance in her voice and occasionally I saw a faraway look in her eyes. In some moments I felt the tension of her grief for her mother and the puzzle of her future.

I asked Zinat when and how she learned weave. She answered,

> I was about 5 or 6 years old when I first sat by my mother's loom and watched her weave. Sometimes she would give me wool to untangle. My mother gradually taught me how to *rishezadan* [*how to start weaving the weft threads through the warp on the loom, and to add the pile*]. After I lost my mother in the fire, I sat by my father and grandmother and watched them weave.
>
> When I was learning from my grandmother she wove only from a design, but she told us that during her time [*in her generation*], before even my mother was born, she wove carpets from her imagination. We still have two of my grandmother's carpets. My father sold the other two because he needed the money. My father once said that my grandma started with a design of her own and every once in a while she would look at the back of the carpet and repeat the same pattern.

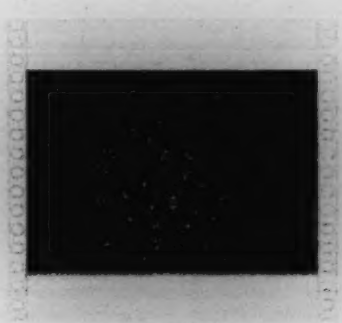


Plate # 51
Zinat's grandmother's carpet
(Khorrami, (2007)

Zinat showed me her grandmother's old carpets (see Plate #51). Even though the carpets were badly worn, I could see that the designs were very complex.

As I listened to Zinat's story, I thought about the places that her grandmother's carpet has been and all the stories woven into it along with the many invisible footprints that have left their marks on it. I thought about mourning and wedding ceremonies where many people would have sat on it and drunk Turkish coffee or tea. I thought about a surface where many love stories were whispered and many tears were shed. I thought about the layers of carpets piled in a store in the bazaar and the ones that were there, laid out in the path to be walked on so they would look aged. I thought about my friend's house and a story he told about when he was a child, hiding live gold fish underneath their carpet so that the fish could not slither away from their little hands when they were playing.

I asked Zinat whether she liked weaving. Her facial expression remained unchanged. She spoke softly as she replied:

> Well, it is hard work and no reward, but still I like what I am doing. I like the time that I am all by myself, concentrating on weaving and sometimes I daydream (see Plate #52).

Plate #52
Daydreaming at the loom
(Khorrami, 2007)

Is Zinat's imagination frozen in time or am I imagining what's on her mind? I wished I could read Zinat's thoughts for few minutes and know what she thinks or imagines when she weaves. She sounded proud that she had the talent to weave from the design templates and that her grandmother's carpet belonged to the past and she has the future to think of. Her mother gave her wool to untangle when she was young as she sat by her. Maybe her mother wished her to untangle her life and move on. Zinat and her grandmother use their imagination in different ways. Zinat uses her imagination to escape the mundane carpet-weaving life by daydreaming about her marriage and future. Her grandmother used her imagination to create artistic carpets.

Greene (1995) describes our connection with the imagination as part of the process of creating self and identity because the imagination permits us to "move beyond" and "view our world from alternative realities" (p.127). In our imagination we "envision a possible identity." When we can imagine things being otherwise, we can begin to act as though they can be changed. She goes on to say that the "world's panorama" is opened as the arts "arouse persons to wide awakenness, to courageous life" and that the arts engage "the imagination not to resolve, not to point the way, not to improve, but to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard and unexpected" (pp.224-226). Momaday (as cited in Minh-Ha, 1991) describes imagination and says, "We are what we imagine" (p.18). He claims that our very existence is consisting in our imagination of ourselves and the greatest tragedy is to go unimagined.

I am reminded of Berger and the different ways he describes imagination and narrative. He parallels the stars in the sky with imagination and states, "...tracing an imaginary line between a cluster of stars [give] them an image and an identity" and by

doing so he continues, "[the] stars threaded on that line were like events threaded on a narrative." Berger furthers that "the constellations did not of course change the stars, nor did it change the black emptiness that surrounds them" but what had "changed was the way people read the night sky." He continues applying his metaphor of the sky for imaginations by explaining that "the problem of time is like the darkness of the sky" and "every event is inscribed in its own time" (Berger, 2005, p.8).

Was Zinat's imagination creating different narratives than in her reality? It seems that Zinat's life is in her imagination and her real world is a place she wishes to escape yet the two are entangled. Art begins in the imagination because it allows us to break the boundaries of life. Is Zinat an artist like other artists who struggle to survive? Is she just like a bird left in a dark room flying into walls, until it drops to the floor becoming a soulless carcass sucked down by the gravity of the life's limitations? Unlike artists who often become well known only after their death, their work becomes a piece of an auctioneer's event and later becomes a fetish of the household and a rare capital among other furniture. In other families distant from her - in those settings she will never see her imagine. Zinat may remain an unknown artist. Her carpets will become commodities in someone else's estate. In this way Zinat is now hung on the wall without a signature.

As I turned back from my thoughts, Zinat continued to explain a dilemma she felt in her life as carpet weaver. She said,

> If I don't weave I can't do anything else. I don't have education and I don't know what else I can do, if I were not a carpet weaver. I would have liked to be a police officer, or work in the army, because I like action, and a police or army officer can work inside and outside the country. They belong to a union.

- *Why did she wish that she could be a police or an army officer? What is so important about belonging to a union? Does she feel trapped in her little space in the*

basement room or trapped in the village? Does she feel unprotected and desirous of law and order in her life? Is there no official body to protect her rights? As I contemplated these questions, outside I heard the voice of the street vendor shouting, "Sabzieh tazeh, bademjan va ghojeh farangi" [fresh herb, egg plant, tomato...].

I was distracted for a moment as this familiar sound took me back to my childhood when vendors would come down the alleys carrying fresh ingredients for cooking lunch in the morning. Sometimes in the afternoon a vendor moved through the village carrying a whirligig, Kaleidoscope, noisemakers and sometimes he carried a small brass chamber on four wheels called a shahr-e-farang with three peep holes that allowed us to watch the world in moving images (see Plate #53). *Now as a narrative researcher, I am peering through another peep hole, here in this present moment that offers me a glimpse into Zinat's life as carpet weaver.*

Zinat brought me back into her world by making a gesture with her hand like a fan to show me the size and the content of the basement room where she lives, works and imagines another life. She says,

> Living all together in one room does not leave us any privacy. When I am weaving no one bothers me. They know that I am working. I think about my future and my fiancé. I think about the place I will be moving into when I get married and how I want to decorate it and how I want to raise my children. I don't want my children to be carpet weavers. I'd like them to go to school and get education.

Plate # 53
Shahr-e-farang
(Khorrami, 2007)

"Utopias exist only in carpets." "But [carpet weavers] know too that what they have been subjected to in their lives is intolerable. And the naming of the

intolerable is itself the hope" (Berger, p.18). Zinat's daydreaming reminds me of the moving images of Shahr-e-farang. A dream brings her instant happiness but in reality she may only become a woman in another weaving household, her own. Zinat takes the act of weaving to create a private space, her own space in time. She separates her private space by hanging an imaginary veil between her and her family. An imaginary veil in itself is woven of Zinat's dreams and imagination from which she transforms into her carpet. She is not permitted to be creative with the carpet design but the essence of Zinat is still in the carpet.

Zinat's creativity is not totally suppressed. She remarks on this when she says,

> I like weaving because I work with colour and design all the time and it is very relaxing. Sometimes I don't notice the time passing. If the colours are bright I feel a special energy and they make me want to look at them. If the design has flowers and birds I feel like I am in a garden and walking through it.

By walking through this imaginary garden Zinat is weaving her own identity into this layered multicolored paradise (see Plate #54, a-b). *With her inner eye, she experiences the space of her own*

a) Garden scene carpet

b) Birds and trees carpet

Plate # 54
Imaginary gardens
(Khorrami, 2007)

imagination and reflection and it is within the protection of this space that she constructs meaning. She constructs personal meanings that stay dormant as the carpet journeys across the ocean where I find it beneath my feet. It reaches out to us and it reaches out to the clouds.

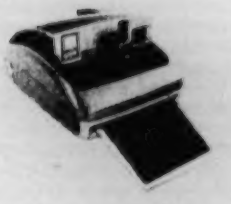


Plate # 55
Polaroid instant camera
(Khorrami, 2007)

As planned, I gave Zinat a Polaroid instant camera (see Plate #55) and instructed her to take pictures of the images in her life that pleased her. The following are the images and the resulting conversation as Zinat explained her choices.

Photos by Zinat

Plate # 56
Zinat's Polaroid picture of chickens and roosters in backyard.

Zinat said about the picture in Plate #56,

> We have few chickens and two roosters and they lay eggs for us and we collect eggs every day. They are fresh and free. They are our pets. My sister comes here and plays with them.

I thought about the importance of these chickens and roosters to 'Abdol's family.' To me they didn't mean anything, but to Zinat there were obviously important enough to take a photograph of. Previously Zinat described the chicken eggs as "fresh and free" and said the youngest daughter plays with the chickens and roosters as family pets. They are obviously highly valued because the poultry is a food source and perhaps used for feathered pillow filling.

Plate # 57
Zinat's picture of a *tanoor* [bread oven] built near the chicken coop.

The *tanoor* is built near the chicken coop and is covered with a metal door when not in use. A *tanoor* is a round oven which is heated with wood. The *tanoor* is used mainly to make flat bread where the dough is flattened into round shapes and then it is placed on a hard fabric covered form. Once the walls are hot, the bread dough is placed

against the inside wall of the oven to bake. Zinat explained the significance of the *tanoor* (see Plate #57) to her family. She said,

> The *tanoor* is important to me, first because my father made it and second because every month all of the family participate in preparing the dough and making the bread. We usually have lots of fun and the bread is really good because we know about its ingredients.

Plate # 58
Zinat's Picture of her cousin Setareh at her cousin's home.

When I asked Zinat about taking the picture of Setareh in plate #58, she said,

> Setareh is always around, playing with Marzieh (Zinat's younger sister).

Setareh is an important member of the extended family because she is the youngest. Everyone seemed to enjoy her presence. Family ties are important in this family's life. Cousins are almost as close as brothers and sisters. As one of the youngest family members Setareh is cared for by everyone. I thought that Zinat enjoyed having Setareh around because she was such a pleasant young girl. Zinat does not have the freedom Setareh enjoys because she lost that freedom when she took over the responsibilities of her mother. I imagined that Zinat missed those years of transition to

adulthood and watching Setareh allows Zinat the opportunity to remember childhood innocence that was tragically taken away with the traumatic and untimely death of her mother.

Narrative Account of Pirouz

Although the research in the present study focused on woman carpet weavers, it came to my attention that two young men, Pirouz and his brother Babak, were also weaving (see Plate #59). I interviewed each boy separately. I decided to explore their contributions and opinions as family members because they were not only carpet weavers but they also learned to weave from the women. Although the girls' interviews occurred in the main floor room, I talked briefly with the two boys in the basement room. The interviews with the young men were brief and mainly conducted to show respect for the men in the family and to keep a balance by bringing in a different perspective. The boys didn't seem to mind talking in front of each other and seemed more comfortable at the loom because no one else was in the room. In this way I did not interrupt their work time.

Plate # 59
Two brothers
(Khorrami, 2007)

I began talking with Pirouz, a smiling, thin, shy young man of nineteen years. He had short black hair and thick glasses. His teenage acne showed he was still in transition to adulthood. He wore a short-sleeved shirt and was barefoot. His hands were rough for his age. I used open-ended questions about weaving to develop a comfortable rapport and to allow for a natural discussion. I asked spontaneous questions that were pertinent enough to encourage an unfolding narrative.

As I observed him squatting in front of a carpet, I wondered how many carpets those hands had touched and how many knots they had tied (see Plates #60, 61 and 62). *In the end, when the carpet leaves his hands, his story becomes somebody else's story with a different narrative.*

Plate # 60
Pirouz squatting on bench
(Khorrami, 2007)

Plate # 61
Pirouz works with template
(Khorrami, 2007)

I asked Pirouz when he started weaving. He responded:

> I was 8 years old when I started weaving and I am now 19 years old. I learned to weave from my grandmother. When I was a child I liked weaving, but after a while I did not like it and now I am forced to do it.

When I asked about his schooling he explained that he only completed second grade. He explained,

School was all day long and I couldn't go to school and weave at the same time. I had to weave to help my father. We almost all had to leave school to engage in carpet-weaving to survive. I have since taken some vocational courses in printmaking, but had to leave it again. I still have all my books, screens and paints in my cupboard. I can get my diploma if I spend some time reading at home and take the exam.

I would do anything but carpet-weaving. Carpet-weaving has no future and there is not much money one can earn. One always has to depend on someone else. In any other business you have some cash to run the business and without it you are always borrowing and in debt. We don't have any money to run our own business and therefore we are always in need of a contract whether it'll be paid at the end or not. There is no guarantee for payment. Sometimes we spend weeks and months to finish a carpet and at the end we might not get paid or if we get paid it will be small percentage that is only a survival wage. Many weavers have health problems like eye sight or backache. When we are unable to weave anymore, there is no health coverage for piece workers.

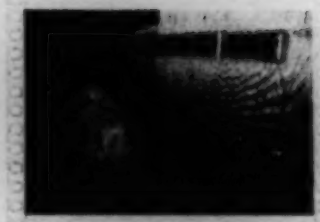


Plate # 62
Pirouz at work
(Khorrami, 2007)

A few days after Pirouz's interview and after I contemplated his concern for health coverage for carpet weavers, I inquired at Mrs. Tohidi's workshop about carpet weavers and whether carpet weavers had unions or co-ops that they could join so that they would have health benefits. She told me that there are both unions and co-ops for carpet weavers, but one has to pay them to become a union member in order to get material cheap or get contracts through them. She explained that co-ops are under unions and by paying the co-op every year membership is assured, but there are no benefits such as medical coverage or pensions and no coverage for carpet weavers. She told me that

co-ops are more like legal agents that enable carpet weavers to access cheaper materials and act as places to sell the finished carpets for profit.

Co-ops are not unions. The poorer carpet weavers cannot afford to become members therefore it appears these institutions are not supportive for the weavers that are in need of their help but more supportive of those who would enslave the weavers. I was saddened to realize that my vision of the wonderful work the co-ops would be doing as supporters for weavers was shattered. The co-ops are there for their profit and the benefit to carpet-weaving families is minimal. The co-op helps Mrs. Tohidi but not the individuals at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Mrs. Tohidi pays her workers weekly. Full-time workers receive approximately forty Canadian dollars a week. Their wages are based on how many rows they weave each day. Zinat works part-time and Gohar works full-time at Mrs. Tohidi's. Usually two to four people work on the same carpet together and when the carpet was sold through the co-op, Mrs. Tohidi pays her workers. The money workers receive is not reflective of the amount of time and work they put in. No one receives health care benefits. Independent weavers like Pirouz's family do not have the capital to become members of the co-op and so are not secure financially and very vulnerable to exploitation. I wondered if Pirouz thought printmaking was more financially secure.

I asked Pirouz why he chose to study printmaking. He said,

> Printmaking is like carpet-weaving. You work with colours and design. You can be creative. I like to have my own shop one day.

I recognized the stifled artist in him. Pirouz does not want to copy another designer's design. Weavers like Pirouz and his sisters all have a dream that may never become reality. The sad thing is that carpet-weaving is an art, but even the carpet weaver

does not recognize it as an art form any longer. The grandmother remembered the time when she wove from her imagination and commanded a large sum of money for her original carpet designs. The literature suggests that children are encouraged by their mothers to weave because mothers would describe carpet-weaving as art, not work. They eagerly join the family weavers believing they are learning to create something special, then, as they grow older the idea of art is lost and they become merely laborers consumed by finance concerns, deadlines and contracts. Their artistic imagination, hopes and creative voices are drowned out by the pressure of surviving.

In Pirouz's spare time he indicated that he visits friends and watches television. He said there was not much to do. He is isolated for many activities because he lives in poverty. Poverty does not recognize gender.

I realized, that even though the women carpet weavers' contribution is unrecognized the young men suffer a different type of stress in their struggle for rights and economic stability. I wondered about Pirouz's relationship with his mother and whether he respected her contribution to the family.

I asked Pirouz what he remembered most about his mother. He said,

> Her courage! She saved us kids from explosion and lost her life. I was only four years old and my mother took all four of us to wash. The bathroom went cold and she thought the pilot light had gone off. Gas had filled the bathroom and my mother didn't smell the gas, so when she stroked a match, suddenly there was a huge explosion. I remember my mother throwing herself on us kids so we would survive and she died.

He showed me the scars that traveled around his neck and down his back. After the explosion, Pirouz's grandmother cared for the four children for a while and then Zinat took care of them. He explained Zinat's role,

> She is our older sister. Later we all took care of each other.

Traditionally, girls take responsibilities after their mother and boys after their father if one of the parents is absent or unable to provide for the family. In addition to contributing to the household economically, children in some carpet-weaving families bear the pressure of taking over for deceased parents.

Photos by Pirouz

Plate #63
Pirouz's snapshot of his cousin Setareh,
taken at her mother's home.

During one of my visits to Abdol's house I met Setareh's mother. She offered to show me her carpets so I visited Setareh's home with Badri and Marzieh. While I was there I photographed the family home and the carpets. At eleven years of age, Setareh is just beginning to learn how to weave whereas Zinat learned to weave at the age of five and Pirouz learned weaving at the age of eight. I noticed her beautiful fine features and understood that her quiet demeanor was because she was shy around strangers.

Then, I asked Pirouz to tell me about the reason he took a picture of Setareh (see Plate #63) and its meaning. He giggled and said,

> This is Setareh *bigham* (someone who has no worries). She is too young to understand what's going around in life. When she gets to our age then she will know. I took this picture at my aunt's who lives nearby because their house is nice and they have some new furniture like the chair that Setareh is standing on. The mirror is new too. We don't have a mirror in our house and I like this mirror.

I thought about his appreciation of his aunt's wealth and his dreams to live in a place such as the one where Setareh lives. At nineteen years of age, Pirouz already sees the innocence and freedom of youth in his cousin. I wondered if he ever really had a childhood because he has always been a weaver. His cousin provides him with a glimpse of what he missed as a child. Does his cousin's childhood reflect the childhood he missed with his mother? I imagined that the mirror in the photograph metaphorically acknowledged Pirouz's love for Setareh and his lost opportunities because she has had a less traumatic childhood. I am saddened that he already acts and feels old - only eight years separate them in age.

Plate #64
Computer at Setareh's home.

Pirouz talked about why he took a picture of the computer (see Plate #64).

> This is the computer in my aunt's house (Badri's sister). My cousins use them. They say that they can get lots of information from around the world.

One of Pirouz's female cousins finished high school and is preparing to attend university. Her parents have higher economic status than Pirouz's family. Her mother weaves and her father has his own small wheat warehouse. I thought, although Pirouz often felt trapped by poverty and the carpet-weaving, access to a computer offered him hope, contact with the outside world and an escape from the mundane. In 1969 when I was in Iran, a computer in the home in the village was never seen. I was also surprised to learn that the female cousin is preparing to go to university. Long ago I would not have expected to find a female with a higher education than her male cousin who remains in a village. Pirouz explained that his cousin knows how to weave carpets but she made the decision not to become a weaver. I wondered if Pirouz could have ever made that decision.

Narrative Account of Babak

I heard these words as I entered the room in the basement where I found Pirouz and Babak seated on a long horizontal bench behind the loom with their legs tucked underneath themselves. "Roosh gedan, gedan yeki, baghalash, gedan"....this was the sound of Pirouz reading design instructions to Babak. When they heard me enter the room they stopped to say "hello". I asked them if this was a good time to interview them. They

Plate # 65
Babak weaving
(Khorrami, 2007)

both smiled and said they needed a stretch anyway so they could talk to me.

The design instructions were in the Turkish language. I could not understand the meaning. Pirouz understood Turkish because his father, Abdol, was Turkish. He read the design out in a chant-like manner. The sound of his voice and the words were mesmerizing and music to my ears.

Babak is 16 years old (see Plates #65 and #66). He went to school until grade six when he quit to help his family make a living because his father was having problems taking care of the family [where girls have to follow traditions, boys are expected to help their father]. At that time Zinat and Pirouz taught him to weave.

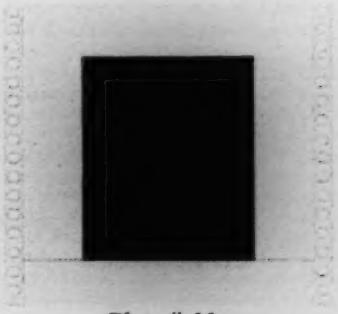


Plate # 66
Babak

I noticed in this family, boys are given the opportunity to go to school longer than the girls. I asked Babak about his life as a carpet weaver and his memories of his mother. He said,

> I don't think much. It is a job. We don't get much out of it.
>
> I remember one day my mother took four of us to bath. It was getting cold in there and I remember my mother left us for a while to check the hot water tank. Suddenly there was an explosion and I remember my

> mother hugged all of us kids to protect us from the fire. We survived and she died. I still have the burn marks on my shoulders.
>
> I remember she always made sure that at bed time my blanket was tucked in. This made me feel secure.

The two boys' memories of their mother indicated her death had had a strong effect on them. This aroused a curiosity in me and as I wanted to see the image of their mother martyr. As a photographer, I had already pictured their mother in my mind, so I needed to confirm or discredit my imagination with the real image.

Plate # 67
Photo of Babak's mother
(Khorrami, 2007)

Barthes (1980) describes portraiture, the experience of being before the camera as a certificate for presence, which he refers to as the essence of photography (p.87). Barthes notes that not every photographic subject can appeal to us. Only the photograph that we personally are involved with engage us, because they reveal the "that-has-been" and that "a photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially" (p.4). In describing his mother's photographs after her death, Barthes expresses that different photographs capture different

aspects of her person [his mother], but not the "truth of the face I had loved" (p.66).

I asked Babak if he had kept a photograph of his mother. He nodded and quietly went towards a shoe box, hidden under some of his personal belongings, and looked through it. He came back with the picture of his mother (see Plate #67).

He held the photograph gently as though it was fragile and precious. The way he was holding the photograph suggested to me that it belonged sacredly to his past. The image held a pleasant memory that he did not want to part with: a fragment of the past that was traveling with him along the tracks of his life in the present and to the future. Berger describes the memories that connect the past and future as "one continuous present" (p.21). Embedded in the photograph of Pirouz and Babak's mother, is the loving truth of a kind face that once existed. Barthes (1980) suggests that the true meaning of a photograph is personal and only seen and felt through the eyes of the beholder. Pirouz and Babak can see and feel their own truths about their mother in that photograph.

Babak's affection for his mother and the fact that he is the only one of the siblings to keep his mother's photograph mirrored back to me an image of my own love and attachment to my mother. Once I thought that my mother was mine only, not my other two sisters' mother and not even my father's wife. This intense feeling towards her increased my expectations of her and made me a vulnerable child which sometimes hurt. Like Babak, her good night kisses on my cheek made me feel secure and that I was cared for and loved. This attachment was not only mine, but my mother's as well. My sickness and a misdiagnosis of a terminal illness from the family doctor had worried my

mother so much that she focused all her attention on me to save me from dying. Still, to this day, there is a strong bond between my mother and I. The instinct of motherhood to nurture, protect and save her children is a strong manifestation of love and care in both Babak's and my relationship with our mothers. Having no children of my own, I also recognized how I have carried on the mothering instinct by saving my crippled bird from dying.

Babak and I continued our discussions. He talked about his grandparents and the first carpet he wove. He said,

> My grandmother always told me stories and my grandfather used to take me to the corner shop and buy me sunflower seeds. My grandmother told me the stories that many children hear.
>
> I was 10 years old when I made my first carpet with my sister and brother. We liked it a lot and we walked on it to feel it. It was almost like we couldn't believe that we made it. We even took a picture of it which is still in my mother's (stepmother) photo album.

Pirouz asked his stepmother to bring the photo album and show the carpet to me. She could not find the photo album. Pirouz told me that one picture was of himself and his brother. There was another photo of himself and his sister, and another one of all of them together with the carpet. They only had two photos of the first carpet left. I did not insist that they continue searching for the photo album because I did not want to bother their stepmother.

I wish I had seen this photograph of the carpet because it was his first work and he seemed so proud of it. The enthusiasm and pride was part of his past. In the past, they were not merely laborers. They had achieved something and felt like somebody. The missing photograph seems to imply a missing recognition of the sacrifices the children are making for the household and their mother made for them.

I asked, "When you finish a carpet do you feel as excited as your first carpet?"

> Not anymore. We get excited when we can sell the carpet and get money out of it. We never feel attached to the work we do because we know it is not going to be ours to begin with and we sell it so cheap. We never make a profit. The people who profit are the *bazaaris'* [merchants in the bazaar]. The only place that our work is appreciated is out of the country.

Appreciation of carpets outside the country denotes a different meaning when displayed. Not the meaning it embodies, not the faces, not the blistered hands and not the darkness of lost hope behind the surface of the carpet, but of the hierarchy of taste, a social distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) of the conspicuous consumer (Veblen, 2001), a privileged lifestyle. International market demands have commodified Persian carpets and taken away tradition from its own people. The weaver's focus has shifted away from the traditional meaning in the symbols and color to a focus on mass production of as many salable carpets as possible. The value has shifted from something that has personal worth and meaning to the creation of something that will only have personal worth and meaning to those who buy it.

I asked Babak to explain how the merchant relationship worked in his village. He said,

> The merchant who orders carpets from us has a few brothers in Europe. I know one who lives in Germany. He buys the carpets from us and sends them to his brothers to be sold there. If there was not a market for that he wouldn't do it. The merchant provides the materials and at the end whatever is left he takes back with him. He doesn't even leave a thread of wool behind. He even takes all the looms away.

As I studied the design Babak was working on I could not imagine how it was woven. I asked Babak about the design details and he said,

> This design is actually very easy and we can weave it with our eyes closed. We learned it from when we were only 8 years old and now it is very easy for us. It is not good for our eyes and backs. We all have problem with eyesight and back problems, but we still have to continue doing it.

I asked Babak to show me how both weavers weave together. Babak and Pirouz returned to their positions at the loom and Babak explained that they first divide the carpet surface into half and weave from the outside towards the center. Pirouz is in charge of reading the design, loudly describing the knots and colours for both of them.

While I was taping, Pirouz began reading the design instructions. He said,

> Avalash doosh, doosh salan, yeki rad kon yeki salan, dobar salan, bazham salan, avalash, yeki poshtash, roosh, roosh, dobar roosh salam yeki poshtash, roosh yeki poshtash, roosh bedan, gedan yeki baghalash, gedan, dout do gheroush, salam, salan chaharta rad kon, yeki setah salan, akharash roosh, setah rad kon, yekdooneh darchini, roosh setah gedanm gedan, bazham gedan...

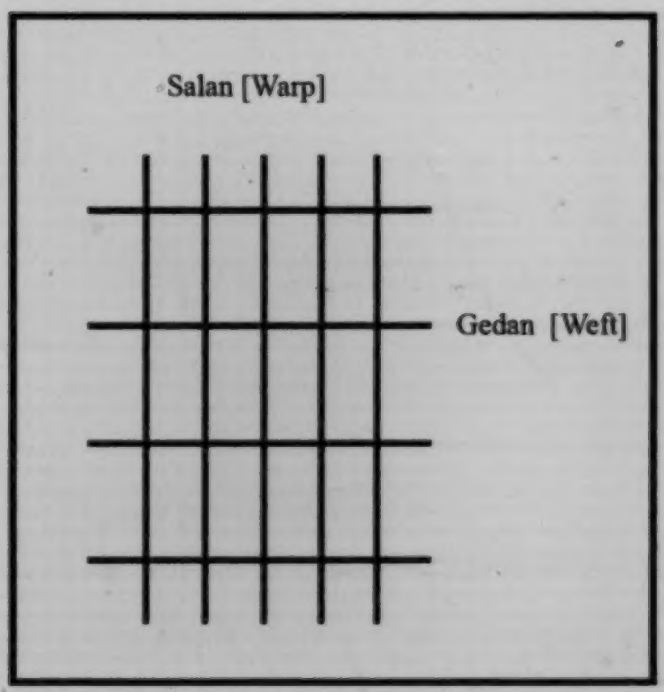


Figure 4. Turkish words for warp and weft.

When I asked Pirouz what the words meant, he just described them as one up, one down. I asked a Turkish speaking friend to translate the words and the below translation is a literal word by word translation:

"...First, over, one under; let go one, one under; two under, under again. First, one under; over, over, two over; under, one under; over, one under, one over; over, one beside; over, four knots; under, let go four under; one, three, three, at the end; over, let go three; one *darchini* [refers to cinnamon color]; over, three under; under, under..." Pirouz read in both Farsi and Azari. I only understood the Farsi and the rest I asked Pirouz to translate for me. Pirouz said that his brother did not look at the design. He wove only from what he heard from Pirouz.

Photos by Babak

Babak took only one picture with the camera I provided although the other participants brought me more than one.

Plate #68
Aks-e-Yadegari [A photo for keepsake]

Babak described his photo of his brother in Plate #68 as follows:

> I like my brother a lot and he is my older brother and I look up to him. We also work together everyday on the same bench. We are almost inseparable. If I don't see him for a while I will miss him and I feel that part of me is missing.
>
> I am close to my sisters but I can't talk to them about everything. I can talk to Pirouz. He is my brother and my friend.

Babak knows his sisters are going to get married and someday they will be gone. He has a stronger connection with his brother. He is closer to him and he knows that they will take care of each other. They both lost their mother and they will be losing their sisters so they face life together.

a) Gohar and co-worker

b) Gohar

c) Explaining weaving

d) Gohar and her Gabbeh

Plate # 69
Gohar at Mrs. Tohidi's
(Khorrami, 2007)

Narrative Account of Gohar

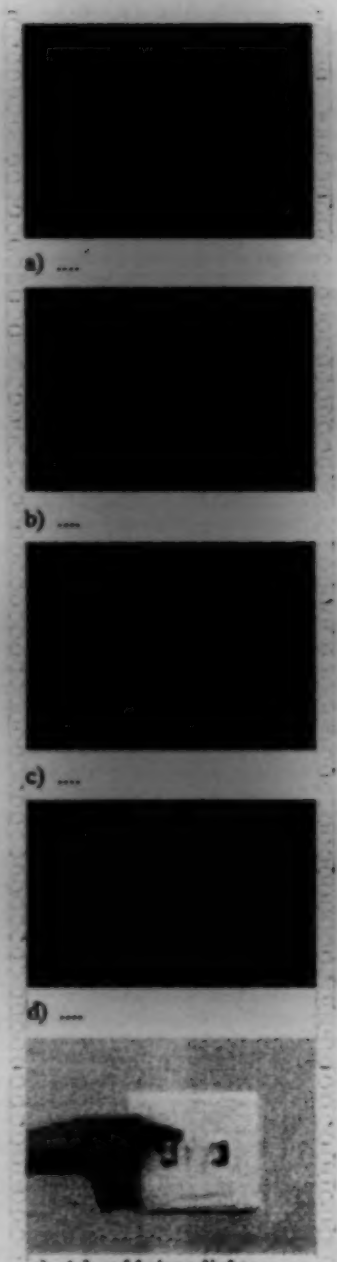
On my fourth trip to Abu Zeyd Abad, I videotaped an interview with Gohar who is Badri's eldest daughter. Because Gohar is blind, it became necessary to videotape her consent for the interview. I chose to interview Gohar at Mrs. Tohidi's workshop so she could show me her carpet-weaving because she can only weave at the workshop where the equipment is provided for blind weavers. Gohar is 15 years old, about five feet tall and wears a black *chador* (veil).

My first impression of her was that she had a bright personality and enthusiasm for her work (see Plate #69, a-d). She is very proud of her weaving. Everyday, Gohar travels by bus to Mrs.Tohidi's workshop to weave for at least eight hours a day.

The day of our first meeting, there were four other women working at Mrs. Tohidi's workshop. The background filled with the sound of noisy air-conditioning. A doorbell rang once in a while, so our conversations were interrupted and often difficult to hear. Gohar guided me towards her loom, tucked in a dark corner at the very end of the workshop. Without thinking, I requested more light from Gohar. Before Gohar could reach for the light switch another carpet weaver quickly responded and turned on the light (see Plate #70, a-e).

Not having sufficient light was not a problem for her, but it was a problem for me. I unconsciously asked Gohar for light which I later felt embarrassed about.

Gohar knelt to explain the procedures she followed. I asked her to talk about her weaving and the carpet she was presently working on. She said,



a) ....

b) ....

c) ....

d) ....

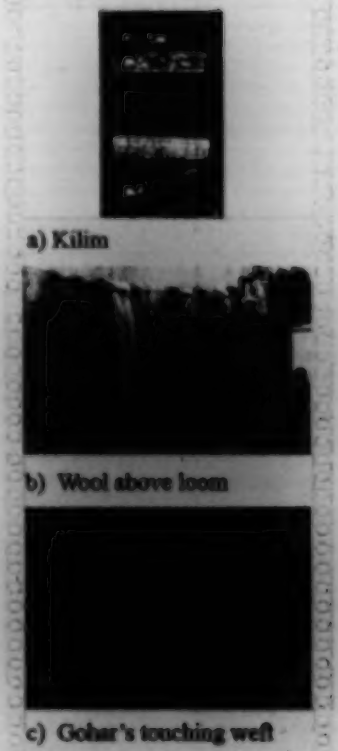
e) A hand brings light

Plate # 70
Moments of darkness
(Khorrami, 2007)

> Right now I am weaving a Gabbeh. A Gabbeh (a long-piled, coarse woven rug with native designs made by nomads) is woven from the imagination, but for us blind weavers we have to follow certain designs that are especially made for us. The lines (design) are raised and by touching them we can weave. These lines are used internationally. Here, Mrs. Tohidi, with the cooperation of her other blind students have created a squared raised design. By touching them we can follow the design.

I asked Gohar about the different colours and the way she chooses them. She said,

> The colored material is hung to the top of the loom in an order and we have to know 36 of them by heart. Each color has a number code assigned to it. For example, we know that number 3 is our blue or number one is our red.
>
> When we start a new carpet, Mrs. Tohidi tells us what colors the carpet design consists of and she then arranges the material accordingly. When we want to weave red we easily pull red down and use it. This method is used for weaving any kind of carpet whether it is *Kilim* (a pile less woven rug), *Jajim* (a flat-weave made by combining a few warp strips together. *Jajims* will then be made into bed covers or curtains) or high-quality silk carpet (see Plate # 71, a-c).



a) Kilim

b) Wool above loom

c) Gohar's touching weft

Plate # 71
Sensory perceptions
(Khorrami, 2007)

I noticed Gohar's confidence in herself. She has the opportunity to teach others. Her skill is labeled as outstanding. She discussed carpet-weaving intellectually and proudly. This was unlike the other weavers I had interviewed in her family. The other

weavers expressed a feeling of being trapped and a frustration with the everyday chore of carpet-weaving. They seemed unhappy and dissatisfied so as a result they did not describe their work as eloquently. I wondered if the others were seen as talented, the carpet merchants might keep that from them to hide the true value of their weaving. Somehow Gohar had found purpose in this work so she put all her energy and imagination into weaving the carpets. As a result, Gohar has gained recognition for her work. Gohar mentioned that she has won national awards in contests for blind weavers for her carpet-weaving skills I asked her if she had woven a silk carpet alone. She responded enthusiastically,

Plate # 72
Kilim covered lampshade
(Khorrami, 2007)

> Yes! I have actually ranked first class nationwide among other blind weavers for weaving silk carpets, *Kilim* and *Jajim*. I am also trained to teach other physically and mentally challenged students how to weave. I have been the coach for a year for blind people and two years for mentally challenged people. I owe all this to Mrs. Tohidi. She started this in 2002 and now there are 13 of us. Mrs. Tohidi aims to tutor 20-25 students.

Her achievements and pride amazed me. Something in her worldview was different than the others so I questioned her further.

Gohar explained earlier that she lost her vision at birth. I asked, "So you have not seen the physical world. What is your world like?"

> No, I have not seen the world, but I can imagine that my handicap is not a deprivation. There is an Iranian saying: It is not a shame to be blind. Shameful is a heart without sight.

Gohar picked up one of her weaving projects to show me. It was an unusual hand-made *Kilim* to cover a lamp (see Plate #72). She was extremely proud of what she had made. She picked another one from her collection and held both of them close together in front her. One was red and white and the other was turquoise and white.

She really wanted to show that being blind is not a barrier for her. The fact that she is blind and yet had made a cover to subdue the light made me realize the contrast between her very existence and the function of her creative work. I wondered if deep inside she desired to stay blind because her world was more colorful and optimistic than those who could see. Silverman in his foreword to Keller (2000) said,

" ...there was a spiritual body within her own imperfect physical one and that the spiritual eyes within her own unseeing eyes would open to a world infinitely more satisfying than this flawed one" (foreword/xxii).

Gohar continued talking about her inner world.

> I know the world is beautiful, but my world is more beautiful. My world is filled with purity because I cannot see any *namahram* (unrelated person outside of the family) therefore I have no sins and this opens the door for me to the heaven.

In Islam, looking at a distant relative or a stranger is prohibited and is considered a sin (see Plate #73).

Naficy (2003) explains,

> ...with the onset of menstruation girls must cover their hair, body parts and body shape by wearing either a veil, a chador or some other modest garb, including headscarf, loose tunic, and long trousers. They need not cover themselves from all men, but only from those who are unrelated (*namahram*) to them. Women's husbands, sons, brothers, fathers and uncles are considered to be related (*mahram*); before them, they need not wear the veil, but they are still required to be modest. On the other hand, women must veil themselves in the presence of unrelated men and unrelated men must avert their eyes (pp 106-159).

Plate # 73
"I have no sins"
(Khorrami, 2007)

Namahram was not a concern of Gohar's because she does not see them. I wondered if her immunity to those traditional expectations affected her dreams and goals. I asked her to describe what she wished for herself. She said,

> One of my dreams is to go to school and get an education so that I can educate other blinds. I sometimes wish that I could see my family's faces. For every person in the family I have drawn an image in my mind that matches their voices. We have lost our vision but we instead have gained an incredibly strong memory and inner vision. I have a friend that has memorized about seven to eight thousand phone numbers and we call her "Mokhaberat" [telephone company].

I inquired further in order to understand her imagination and how she translates the world. I

wondered how being blind affected her as a weaver because carpet weavers bring pieces of themselves to their work. I started by inquiring about her family. "Are you saying that when you hear your family's voices you can imagine what kind of a person they might appear to be?"

> My imagining who they are might not look who they look like but I create an imaginative image of them that I can refer to in my mind. I have a friend who is very good at describing a person by hearing their voices. As soon as one says hello she can immediately imagine what kind of a person she is talking to just by listening to their voices (see Plate #74).

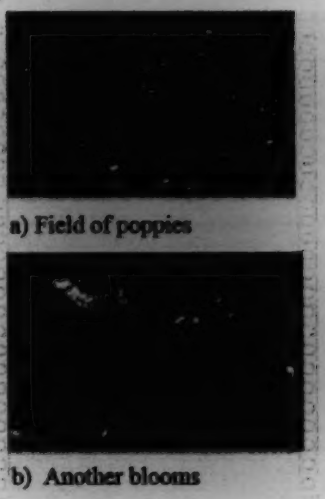
Plate # 74
An imaginative image
(Khorrami, 2007)

I was impressed with Gohar and the images she created without having references in the usual world. It was fascinating how her point of reference existed in her mind without having seen the constructed signs of everyday life. She created her own semiotic of signs, shapes and point of references. Berger captures a similar experience when he says, "Often when I shut my eyes, faces appear before me. What is remarkable about them is their definition. Each face has the sharpness of an engraving" (Berger, 2003, p.12).

Now I became more interested in her experience and viewpoint so I asked her, "How does it feel to be a blind carpet weaver?"

> I feel privileged that I can weave and am not inhibited by my handicap. I never lose hope in who I am and what the future will bring for me. Hope is something that keeps me going in life. I imagine hope as a field full of red poppies and every time one dies another blooms, and this never ends and the field will always be full of poppies (see Plate #75, a-b).

Her comments led me to reflect on an old photograph of my mother when she was young and happy. In the color photograph, my mother was standing in a field of red poppies (see Plate #76). *How could Gohar have described the image so perfectly? This interview is so rich with internal images, for instance, I may look at a carpet that I love and see my own meanings yet I am completely blind to the real conditions under which it was made or the real maker – I have my own image in my mind of the maker and the circumstances just as Gohar has the image in her mind of the design, or her family, or colours. I asked myself, how could she see a field of red poppies if she has never witnessed poppies in reality? Gohar's description is analogous to a sighted person's view of the same reality but is not the same because she has constructed it from a different set of data than a sighted person would. I recalled Zinat's daydreaming (p.130) and thought*



a) Field of poppies

b) Another blooms

Plate # 75
Gohar's image of hope
(Khorrami, 2007)

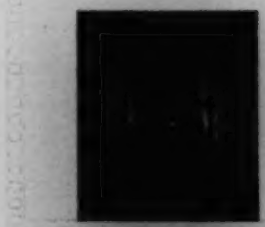
Plate # 76
My mother
(Khorrami, 2007)

about how Zinat used her imagination to escape her everyday life, while Gohar uses her imagination to be engaged with her everyday life.

Narrative Account of Badri

After the private interview with Zinat and the interviews with the two boys, I returned to my sister's home. A few days later I arrived in the late morning to find Badri sitting on the floor cleaning and sorting fresh herbs. She brought me tea and I sat with her on the floor helping her prepare the herbs for the daily meals. My interview with her flowed naturally because her work routine was not interrupted.

Badri married Abdol after his first wife died in an explosion and subsequent fire. She is a tall, heavily-built woman who wears a black head scarf and a black long skirt with opaque black stockings (see Plate #77 a-c). The first time I met her, she was guarded but by the second meeting she was more trusting. She was born in a village near Tabriz in the province of Azerbaijan in northwest of Iran. Her family moved south to Abu Zeyd Abad when she married Abdol. I asked Badri how old she was when she started weaving.



a) Sitting at loom

b) Design template

c) Creative hands

Plate # 77
Badri and her loom
(Khorrami, 2007)

> I was 9 years old when I started *rishezani*. At 13 I was on my own. I am 43 now, so it's about 30 years that I have been weaving. I learned weaving from my mother when I was younger and later my father sent me to someone's house to work. He worked in a public bath as *dalak* [masseur] and was not getting enough money to take care of his family and that's why my mother and I had to weave.

Badri worked outside of her family home at a carpet-weaving workshop. She described the weaving workshop as having rooms that held three or four looms. At the workshop, there were anywhere from 10 to 30 carpet weavers. I asked her about that experience working away from home as a young teenage girl. She said,

> I didn't like being forced to work for someone else but I had no say in this. My parents were poor and so they sent me to weave for someone to make money.
>
> In those days (before the 1979 Islamic revolution) it was not legal for under aged children to weave. Gendarmerie [the police] would once in a while come and visit weaving workshops. If they found any under aged child weaving they would fine the people in charge. But most parents rented their under aged children to these houses for a year behind the authorities back, regardless, because they needed the money and the kids were good sources of money for them.
>
> When I had just learned to weave, my father made a contract with someone he knew and sent me there. At the beginning they didn't put me behind the loom they gave me other menial work to do like sweeping the floor, making tea and other things. Later after about one year, I started weaving for them. I was paid more because he knew my father, but they were really hard on us. They would beat us, yelling at us that we were lazy. It was just like the way people treat a donkey when the donkey has a big load and cannot move or go up a hill. It gets poked by its owner in order to make the donkey move. If we complained to our parents about the mistreatment in the workshop our parents wouldn't believe us. They would blame us for not behaving ourselves and say that we deserved it.
>
> I was very angry and one day when the Gendarmerie came in unexpectedly, I told them everything. I told them that they were using opium in front of us kids and they would bring girls and boys so they would flirt with each other in the workshop. They were fined and told if they didn't behave they would close their workshop.

While Zinat dreams of becoming a police officer, her mother Badri confides in one. They both look for order and power and seek the hand of authority to save them from exploitation and abuse. I question their search for a savior in the police figure that

often has a negative reputation with civilians in Middle Eastern countries. The uniformed authority resembles the myth of the prince who rides on his horse and comes to save the princess. There are many Zinats and Badris whose prayers for liberation from poverty, exploitation and oppression are dusted with hope that may never actualize.

I asked Badri, how the *Ostads* [master craftsperson] treated her after that incident? She said,

> They beat me up, but did not get rid of me because my work was good. I worked there for few years and after being fed up with the situation, one day I slashed one of the carpets many times and ran away. They didn't pay my wages. I went home and told my father that I did not want to go back there any more. He was so ashamed of what I had done. Later, I went to another workshop and gradually advanced from an apprentice to an *ostad*. I made four carpets on my own and one for my dowry.

The dowry is an important part of preparation for marriage for young girls. Iranian marriages are celebrated in the presence of a large gathering with splendor and honor. In the past most marriages were arranged by the parents and older family members. Although traditional families in rural areas still arrange marriages, many new generation Iranians choose their own mates. Their parents' consent is important and taken into account by both the male and the female. The groom's family still approaches the bride's relatives to ask for marriage and once there is consent between both families then the wedding preparations begin.

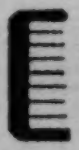
A very important part of the pre-wedding activities is dowry preparation by the bride's family. It includes the acquisition of household items. Until very recently, girls were expected to prepare many of the items themselves. In the carpet-weaving families, the girls weave dowry carpets and rugs long before there was any talk of marriage. The

bride's family buys household items for the dowry. The higher the social status the more elaborate is the dowry and may include properties, as well. Although very modern professional couples with means do not follow this tradition, on the whole the tradition of dowries is still very important and is practiced by the majority (Price, 2001). In Badri's youth, she ordered a design for her dowry carpet. Ordering a design from a shopkeeper was common. The carpet designer would draw a design to the bride's liking.

She said,

> The carpet I wove for my dowry has a design with a deer, lions, a canary on the tree and old figures of *Takht-e-Jamshid* [or Persepolis, remains of Achamenids dynasty 550 B.C.] like the ones with dervishes. To get what I wanted, I went to the bazaar and ordered the design I had in mind from a shopkeeper.
>
> To me the deer is very *mazloom* [very shy animal. I remember when I was a child my aunt took me to the zoo and I remember vividly the deer's eyes and how innocent they were. When I see a deer I almost want to hug her. This image always stayed in my mind. I also like deer because it is said that deer took refuge in Imam Reza's Holy Tomb in Mashad when she was about to be slaughtered and she ran away. The lion is aggressive, the canary is always happy and the dervishes remind me of passage of time. I also like the figures of *Takht-e-Jamshid* because they remind me of the old history...of the past shahs and kingdoms. There is a saying " Ya zamen-e-ahoo Imam Reza." I also like the camel because like the deer she is very shy.

a) Dove



b) Comb

c) Cock

d) Peacock

e) Tree of Life

Plate # 78
Carpet motifs 1
(Khorrami, 2007)

The motifs and stories in carpets make them important documents of culture like the other documents of a nation's history because they reflect important features of the people's social lives, economic structure and aesthetics of the period in which they were woven. Carpets, with their weaving style and technique, meanings and symbols, dyes and colours also reflect the period in which they were woven. Each motif and colour in carpets has deep meaning (see Plates #78-79). The motifs and colours characterized on carpets are a means of communication for the weaver and her environment as if a letter written by the weaver. The motifs are expressions of the weaver's story. Samvat (2007) describes examples of common motifs embedded in carpets. He states,

> The Garden of Paradise motif symbolically represents man's subconscious existence, the original state and the soul as it was before Man was created. The garden vegetation metaphorically draws attention to the aspirant or inner level of consciousness. The Bird metaphorically represents subconscious thought and reminds one that there is no limit to human potential but for our self-imposed limitations. The bird can fly without restriction, embodying the soul-awareness where one can see his/her true nature and realize that freedom exists within his own thoughts. The lion motif

a) Lion

b) Cypress tree

c) Pomegranate

d) Camel

e) Weeping willow

Plate # 79
Carpet motifs 2
(Khorrami, 2007)

> symbolizes expansion; the Cow symbolizes contraction, or the coming together of our desires in the realm of reality and the Eagle motif symbolizes freedom and divine aspiration (Samvat, 2007).

Each colour used in carpet-weaving represents a state of being or emotion: pink represents love; purple represents knowledge; white or cream represents purity; blue represents spirituality; green represents healing; red and orange represents emotions and feelings, and yellow represents wisdom. Each one of us has a certain attraction or affinity for certain designs and colours. Something within the rugs draws us or speaks to us and it is not the same for everyone. Each individual is drawn to different designs and colours based on their present state of conscious awareness (see Plate #80, a-d), (Persian Carpet, 2007).

The camel is another motif in the Iranian culture. Badri shared a story her father once told her about a camel.

> He said: "There was going to be a wedding so the people went to a bazaar to buy a camel to cook for the dinner. They looked at the herd and saw a young pregnant camel. They offered the shepherd very good money to buy the camel so the shepherd agreed to sell. Just before it was time to butcher the camel they gave it a drink of water. The camel ran away and took refuge in the Imam Reza's Haram.

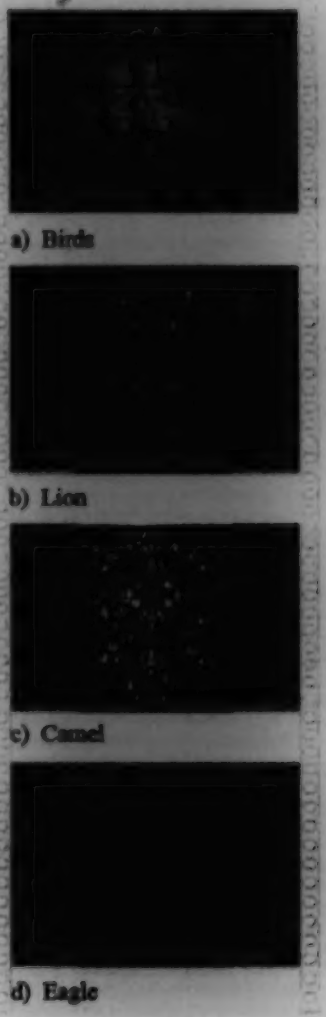


Plate # 80
Motifs in carpets
(Khorrami, 2007)

She was kneeling and crying. From then on, people say, "Don't slaughter a female camel because that is why camels are so hard to find."

Does Badri identify with the animals' figures in her dowry carpet? Did she lose the shy deer in her escape and become the camel seeking refuge from her Ostad? Is Badri the female camel in Abdol's house, protected by the males yet at the same time bound by the patriarchal hierarchy?

The traditional family in Iran is patriarchal in nature. The traditional family rigorously preserves its belief in the hierarchy, unity, and cohesiveness of the domestic group (Nassehi-Behnam, 1985, pp.557-562). Moghadam (1992, pp.35-53) defines patriarchy as a kinship-ordered social structure with strictly defined sex roles in which women are subordinated to men.

I experienced some of the tensions within this type of social structure while I was growing up. Girls had to follow certain, tight rules in order to survive in a society where traditional customs inhibited females from certain activities such as dating. Socializing without an escort could bring shame on the family. We had to obey those rules to keep the family's name and honor. My father's job in the transportation business demanded ongoing travels all over Iran. Living here and there for a while in different small cities, each with its own cultural codes of conduct, added more tension as we had to adapt to the changing cultural mores. Although my family, and other families we associated with, were more open-minded, no parents wanted to be labeled 'not fit' for a community. Therefore, the females were very secluded within the sanctity of the transportation community. This sub-community was kept somewhat isolated within the communities where we lived. This tension expanded to include the larger society as we grew up. Even after I moved away from that restrictive transportation community it took time

before I felts free from those traditional boundaries. After I moved to Tehran to go to university and was no longer living with my parents, I enjoyed breaking all the rules that I had been confined by - just like Badri.

I recognized the rebellion in Badri so I wondered about her marriage relationship. I asked Badri about the traditions she followed to get married and she replied,

> I didn't really choose my husband. We didn't have any rights to choose our husband. It was all arranged. I was a young girl and outspoken and my husband's aunt who lived in our neighbourhood had an eye on me and she always used to say, "you should become my *aroos* [my bride]. One day my husband's family came to *khastegari*, to negotiate marriage with my parents. Although he already had four children from his first wife, my parents agreed and we got married a year later. I never liked my husband right from the moment I saw him and still don't care about him. He is much older than I am, but he is the father of my children. Sometimes he beats me up if he does not approve of what I do or say.

At my first visit with Badri and after our brief conversation, she went to the main floor where she lives with her husband to look for him. She went to tell him what she was doing with us. When she came back I noticed her manner was different. She looked nervous and acted unsettled. She told my sister and I that her husband was sleeping but we suspected that her husband might have abused her (hit or verbally attacked her) while she was upstairs.

I asked Badri, "If you hadn't married to your husband who would you have liked to marry?"

> To the person I was in love with. I met him at the workshop. He was a carpet weaver as well. He negotiated to marry me several times, but because he was from a different village, my father didn't agree. My father said that he does not know the people in that village and that village had a bad reputation for trouble making.
>
> After my father's refusal, my father sent me away with relatives for a while until the man I loved got married. I came back home and shortly after I was engaged to my present husband. I was engaged to him for a year. During my engagement, he lived in a town near our village. When my fiancé was away I worked behind his back in a carpet workshop to save money for my dowry. Those days we had

> to give all our earned money to our parents. We even had to beg for some money to go to the public bath. After my engagement my parents didn't ask for my wage because they knew that I was saving to buy my dowry.
>
> I didn't go to school. My father didn't let me go to school because he thought it was not appropriate for a girl. In the village you had to be very careful if you were a girl. My two brothers went to school while I was at home babysitting my siblings. My brothers taught me how to read and write to grade three at home. My math is good because when you weave you are always counting the knots. When we moved from the village to the town, my younger sisters went to school there.

I thought about how her father's authority affected the selection of a marriage partner, where she worked and whether she got an education. I thought about how the father's authority over many women carpet weavers transferred from the father to another authority, their husbands. Women never thought of themselves as contributors to the household informal economy. They have always seen themselves as simply helpers.

I was interested in Badri's dreams so I asked her, "What were your dreams when you were growing up?" She answered sadly,

> I would have liked to be a hairdresser, but without education you'll still be a carpet weaver. Once you are born a carpet weaver you will always be a carpet weaver.
>
> When I was still living with my poor parents, I used to see girls from our village that had married and had moved to the town and when visiting the village they would show up with fancy outfits. I always envied them and wished that I could one day dress like them. That dream never came through because I got married and my husband was even poorer than my parents.
>
> Now, my dream is for my younger daughter that she gets education and becomes whatever she wants to be and earns good money so she doesn't end up like her mother.

I pursued the idea of art and creativity with Badri. I wanted to know if the older women in the family recognized the artistic value of carpet-weaving. I asked, "What do you think about carpet-weaving as an art?" She answered thoughtfully,

> I think carpet-weaving is an art and I really like doing it, but alas that it does not bring any profit for us. We weavers weave it without thinking of it as an art. We

weave it to survive. If carpet-weaving brought a reasonable income for the family, weaving was more enjoyable and we didn't have to worry about when to get paid. I think there is no appreciation for carpet weavers in our country and only people like you who come from outside can appreciate it.

These days everybody is after their own profit and they look for sources to get rich fast. One would die of hunger before getting any dough from the carpet. It takes months to weave a carpet and at the end you never know whether you will be able to sell it or not. In old days although my father did not have a good salary and there were seven of us, but he could still feed us because things were cheap, but nowadays with the inflation it is very difficult to get by.

I personally enjoy weaving now that there are several of us weaving in the family. When I was young I preferred working in the workshop because I was among other people and I liked socializing with them, but now that I am older I prefer weaving at home and I can do household chores as well. Being at home is very relaxing.

My question was about art, yet the answer always seemed to refer back to financial stress and survival issues. I wondered if each generation succumbs to financial pressures.

She told me earlier that her father could feed his family all by himself, but now she said that she and her mother had to weave to support the family. In the past, men were engaged in farming or other outside work while women attended to home weaving. The farming economy in the area disappeared because of the introduction of machines, so the men were no longer needed. These subsistence farmers had become marginalized and landless and could no longer find employment as farmers. As a result women share the home with the men who now play a greater role in spaces traditionally the domain of the women. Badri and her mother didn't consider themselves as sources of supplementary income to the household because women's work was not acknowledged economically. In the literature this was very typical of women who work at home and contribute to the informal household economy.

Middlemen are male and only negotiate with the men in the family. The relationship between the businessmen in the carpet industry negates the role of the women as contributors. Badri remembered the middleman who would come with the merchant's request for a certain number of carpets of a certain design. The middleman knew which family produced quality carpets. He found them and offered them a contract. I asked Badri to describe her memory of the middleman. She replied,

> I remember seeing a man coming to our house once in a while to talk to my parents. I didn't know who he was because I was very young, but I guessed that it had to do with the carpets. My mother later told me that this guy was a middleman who would visit few carpet-weaving families to look at their work and pick the best. Some of them would then pay the carpet weaver in advance and when the carpet was finished they would come and pick it up. Sometimes the carpet weavers just sold their carpets in the bazaar to make a little profit.
>
> The family decided on the design for the carpet. Sometimes if a family was short of cash, they would go around and tell a merchant or a middleman that they were starting a new carpet. They would negotiate a deal so that the middleman would provide the material and they would provide space and labor. At the end the carpet was sold to the middleman for a little profit.

In the villages and especially for this family, the role of the middleman, the lack of education, the social dictates requiring dowries and submissive behavior continue to exist below the surface of technological changes.

Photos by Badri

Plate # 81
Ganjeh [Closet]

Badri described the significance of their *ganjeh* (see Plate #81). She said,

> The *ganjeh* has lots of room and we can put everything from bedding to weaving stuff in it. This was my daughter's idea to have this closet. She asked her father to build this. All our lives we have lived and are still living in a small cluttered room among looms and wools and now my daughter says that this closet makes the room cleaner and less cluttered.

The request for building this closet was made by Parvaneh, whom I never met. I wondered why Parvaneh, the mysterious daughter never wanted a closet built in the basement where all of them live? The closet reminds me of my grandmother's closet (see Plate #82, a-c). *I knew what my grandmother had in her closet even though I never learned what was kept in Parvaneh's closet. My grandmother used to keep her leftover lunch in there for later afternoon. I lived with her for four years when I was going to university in Tehran. At the time, my parents were living in another province and my grandmother took care of me. I received room and board and the unconditional love of*

my grandparents. They allocated a room to me on the second floor in the far end of their multi-bedroom huge house. Around 5:00 a.m. in the morning my grandmother woke up to pray. She then prepared my breakfast, brought it up the stairs, left it behind my door and called me. The memory of my grandmother reminds me of Farrokhzad's description of days gone by.

It would begin with the rustle of grandma's veil,
With the appearance of a vague shadow
In the frame of the door
---which would suddenly release itself
in the cold sensations of light---
and the doves' wandering pattern of flight
etched on the colored window panes
Those days... (Farrokhzad, 1981, p.27)

a) My grandmother's room **b) Closet** **c) "In the frame of the door"**

Plate # 82 My grandmother's closet (Khorrami, 2007).

There were many closets in my grandmother's house, but the one she used in their living-room to put her leftover lunch is vivid in my mind. In that closet, she also kept candies and sweets, and whenever I came down to have tea and a short conversation with her, she went to her closet and brought me some of my favorite sweets. I was the only person who shared access to the contents of her closet. In retrospect, I recognize that her sharing was unique to our relationship because others did not have that privilege. Closets are like keepers of secrets both good and bad and once in a while we open them up and disclose some of the hidden experiences, thoughts or secret lives.

Plate # 83
Imam Ali

Badri commented about this picture of Imam Ali (see Plate #83)

> I like Imam Ali and specially his birthday. People celebrate his birthday and it is fun. I like celebration because it brings happiness and it is different from every other day and everybody can enjoy the festive official holiday.

I thought about the significance of Badri's decision to take a picture of this religious leader. It is protected by a curtain so this image is not available to everyone. I realized the importance of her religious beliefs and how this dictates her social values.

Imam Ali was an early Islamic leader and revered by Shi'a and Sunni Muslims. On Ali's birthday people cook special meals and offer them in the neighbourhood as *Nazri*. *Nazri* is the food that is prepared to give thanks for a wish this granted.

Plate # 84
Mehman [visitors] in Badri's livingroom.

Badri took this photo (see Plate #84) of her visiting relatives while I was busy interviewing downstairs. She said,

> I like visitors because we can talk different things and have good time. We don't get many of them.

When I looked at this photo I was reminded of when I first went to Badri's home. I was shocked. The television set and the unit that held the television were an unexpected sight for me. I was stunned to find Venetian blinds on the windows. These were indicators of the changes that had occurred after I left Iran. In my memories, I had images of small rooms, with plain walls with one carpet and a few cushions on the floor. Instead I found modern conveniences slowly integrating into everyday life.

Narrative Account of Omolbani

My last interview was with Omolbani, Badri's mother and the children's grandmother (see Plate #85). We first went to Badri's house in the late afternoon. She took my sister, my brother-in-law and I to her parents' house who lived in the same village. Late afternoon was appropriate to conduct the interview because during the hot summer days most people, especially the older ones, take a short nap after lunch. I also did not want to interrupt lunch for both families. After five minute drive in the village, we arrived at Omolbani's home. She was expecting us. She had made tea and eagerly invited us in. Badri's younger sister was also there. I hugged Omolbani as if I had known her for years and I had just returned home (see Plate #86). At Omolbani's request my sister took a photo of Omolbani and I hugging.

Plate # 85
Omolbani
(Khorrami, 2007)

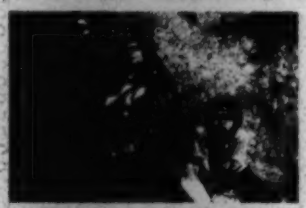
Plate # 86
Hugs
(Khorrami, 2007)

She reminded me of my great grandmother whose image is still so vivid in my mind. In all my visits with 'Abdol's family' and their relatives I hugged and kissed all the women. Hugging Omolbani felt as if I was hugging my homeland and my ancestry all at once.

My brother-in-law went inside to chat with Omolbani's husband and we stayed outside in their small, clean yard. The sound of air-conditioning was very loud and I could not ignore it because it sometimes impaired my hearing. I moved closer to Omolbani so I could hear her better. Omolbani is a short, pleasant woman with a glowing face who wears a floral printed *charghad* [scarf] under her patterned chador [long veil]. Although she is only 67 years old, her face and hands look aged. She leaned against the wall and her granddaughter and two daughters stood beside her (see Plate #87, a-c). I asked her to share her carpet-weaving experiences from when she was a child to when she wove her last carpet. The informal conversation relaxed her and to honor her status as the family matriarch I gave her the lead in how the discussion would unfold. She said,

> I was this big [she is showing her height at approximately her waist with her hands] when I started. I finished a carpet every three months. I wove a lot and now my hands are weak and I can not weave anymore. Those days [during her generation about 40 years ago] carpets were sold very cheap. In those days carpets were sold to rich families. I sold my carpets for only 300 Rls. [Iranian currency which would translate into less than 30 cents today] to the children of *Sarhangs* [colonels] after all the work had gone to it.

a) With daughters and granddaughter



b) Three generations

c) Walking away

Plate # 87
Three generations
(Khorrami, 2007)

(*Sarhangs* position was one of the top ranking in those days. They were highly respected and considered to be affluent families).

I learned weaving from an old woman who was a relative. One day my father took my hand and took me to this old woman and told her "she is yours, you be her *Ostad* and do whatever you want to do." From then on I went there every day and she paid me two Qarn [Iranian currency]. I worked there for few years and then I decided to weave at home. My first carpet didn't turn out very good. It was all crooked and rough. I hadn't learned properly. My second carpet turned out better. I got better and better with each carpet. My first paid carpet was from someone in Kashan. It was a huge undertaking. It was nine meters long, about the size of this house and when I finished I got 400 toman [Iranian currency] for it. After that I worked for ourselves. The first one was sold for 700 toman. It was a handful of money and I was so happy for it. Gradually carpet prices went up and it became hard to sell them. I decided to weave *Kharak* [sometimes also called *khersak* is a coarse and high-pile pile carpet]. It was easier to sell and I could sell a pair for 80,000 toman. I continued weaving until last year. I had about ten kilos of dye, some wool and silk. I sold them all and retired myself from weaving. I could no more weave because of my health. I've lost my sight and my legs ache.

a) Omolbani's courtyard

b) Omolbani's doorway

c) Omolbani's husband's shop

d) Inside husband's shop

e) Omolbani & daughters outside home

Plate # 88
Omolbani's house
(Khorrami, 2007)

I asked Omolbani about her family and her duties both as carpet weaver and a mother. She said,

I got engaged at 15 and got married at 17. When I married my husband did not have money or a house. We all lived in a small room. He only had few camels that he used to sell groceries and fabrics to the households. We were very poor for a while until gradually with my carpet-weaving

> earnings he opened a small grocery store. We changed three houses and this is our third house with the grocery store attached to it. He sells wheat, barely, sunflower seeds and other stuff. He is old and has backaches and is not able to work long hours. Besides no one comes to our store when there are lots of bigger stores around. (see Plate #88, c-e).

I noticed that Omolbani did not mention her husband's career before he owned the store. Badri had referred to the time when her father worked in the public bath as a dalak [masseur].

Badri brought out Omolbani's design plates (see Plate #89, a). Omolbani continued,

> While he worked at the store, I made enough money with carpet-weaving. I wove a carpet for my dowry. I liked weaving carpet when I was young and I never got tired of weaving. If I had saved all the money I had earned from weaving, this house would have been full of money, but I fed my children with my earnings.
>
> I gave birth to fourteen children, nine of them died due to health problems. I was so busy taking care of children, household chores and weaving that I did not notice day and night. Sometimes I would fall sleep by the loom and opened my eyes to the light of the dawn. I was working from early morning to late at night. I cooked, cleaned, fed the children and wove. When my daughters grew a bit older I taught them how to weave and if they didn't weave 10 *raj* [rows] I wouldn't let them go. We had to contract Badri to someone else's workshop so we could make a living.

a) Badri showing me templates

b) Badri's neighbour

Plate # 89
Badri at her mother's
(Khorrami, 2007)

In this interview, I noticed a different tone. Omolbani talked about 'her earnings' and proudly stated "she fed the children with her earning." She also said that she liked weaving. In comparison to the other women who feel trapped, Gohar and Omolbani seem content with their life. Three girls- one granddaughter and two daughters- stood by her side. Were they protecting or supporting her? Once in awhile, she turned to her daughter and spoke in a language I didn't understand. Whenever she couldn't understand me in Farsi, one of the daughters translated my question into a local dialect I did not understand. Throughout the interview everyone seemed excited, because someone wanted to interview Omolbani and videotape her even her neighbour (see Plate # 89, b).

This interview was the culmination of my research. Here I was in Iran with three generations of carpet weavers. The grandmother as the matriarch and the women who surround her with respect reminded me that the carpet represents the mother and it is connected to the earth that it covers.

CHAPTER SIX

The Final Focus: A Meta-Thematic Discussion

In this chapter, I first re-visit the literature review presented in the earlier chapters and then weave together threads on a metaphorical carpet displaying visually the metaphoric warps and wefts affecting women carpet weaver's lives in rural Iran. I next identify thematic threads that resonate throughout the narrative accounts and discuss how these threads reflect back and shape my own ongoing narrative. Because narrative inquiry is a continual negotiation and collaboration of relationships between the researcher and the co-participants, the final discussion in this chapter includes my narrative inquirer's story as it is understood through observation of the dimensions of interaction, continuity, and situation. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state, "When narrative inquirers are in the field, they are never there as disembodied recorders of someone else's experience. They too are having an experience, the experience of the inquiry that entails the experience they set out to explore" (p.81). Narrative inquiry into rituals, routines, metaphors and everyday experiences create a process of reflexive thinking and multiple ways of knowing. The reflective process is a sharing of perspectives between and among the researcher's and the co-participants' overlapping experiences.

My interest in the experiences of rural Iranian women carpet weavers stems from my social concern about the welfare of women and children in weaving households within rural Iranian patriarchal society. Through arts-based narrative inquiry and within the human ecological framework theory, the study provides a voice for family members and explores their involvement in the making of carpets. There is

a focus on the role of the woman as primary weavers and as preservers of carpets as cultural and historical artifacts. The study also explores women weavers as contributors to the household's informal economy and to the informal education of children as the keepers of stories told and re-told throughout the generations. The outcome is a collection of researcher-selected photographs, photographs taken by the co-participant weavers, and narrative accounts that represent and re-present the family situation in a context that is interwoven with the researcher's autobiographical reflections. Weaving together textual and visual narratives achieves a three-dimensional quality.

Placing the Literature Side-by-Side with the Research Findings

The literature review suggested that women carpet weavers in Iran weave from their imaginations and lived stories which are inherently woven into the carpet. The literature also suggested that carpets carry family secrets and traditions that are handed down from generation to generation. With the literature review in mind, I visited three carpet-weaving families in rural Iran with the assistance of Mrs. Tohidi, a carpet-weaving workshop owner and operator. I visited a family in Dastjerd near Kashan; 'Abdol's family' and another family in Abu Zeyd Abad near Qom. 'Abdol's family' was chosen as the focus of the study because they met the research criteria which required access to three generations of women carpet weavers.

The fabric of the village had dramatically changed since I left Iran. Thirty years ago, village homes didn't have electricity or running water. Computers were unheard of and young girls did not attend school or dream of going to university. In 2006, I observed in Dastjerd and Abu Zeyd Abad many carpet-weaving families had

televisions, running water, electricity, modern household decor and access to the world through computer technology.

I also discovered early in my journey that weavers' lives had changed dramatically. Presently they are hired on a contract to produce carpets from predetermined-designs. Whereas in the past, Omolbani did not weave to meet a contract, she wove for private buyers and for her family's use. Weavers have changed from craftspeople to labourers weaving for economic reasons with little chance to demonstrate creativity.

Some younger children do not aspire to be weavers like their mothers because they want to go to university and learn something else. To gain acceptance into university is difficult because the entry requirements are stringent but with ambition and high grades it is possible for Iranian children to achieve a higher education. Once accepted into public university, tuition is free. There are obstacles other than tuition that prevent Iranian villagers from attending university. Living accommodations and expenses inhibit rural youth from relocating to places where education is more accessible. In the younger generation from wealthier families weaving has lost its appeal because other opportunities stimulate their imagination. Although my research criteria did not include children under thirteen years of age, I learned from their mothers that Marzieh at twelve years old, wanted to become a teacher. She and her cousin Setareh, at eleven years old, neither wants to become carpet weavers. Marzieh's family is not as financially secure as her cousin, Setareh's family so her dream of teaching may never come true. In a visit to Setareh's home I met her two older sisters who were preparing to go to university to pursue careers other than carpet-weaving. Even though

the children of carpet-weaving families learn how to weave early in their lives, many appear unwilling to continue a limited life of weaving.

Before I journeyed to Iran, I had developed a romantic artistic notion of carpet weavers which was inspired by Glassie's 1999 poetic writings about carpet-weaving. Glassie writes that carpet weavers completely immerse themselves in their work and when the carpet is completed, it is filled with their human spirit and their cultural history. Instead, I found a lack of creative artistic opportunities for the weavers. Their use of imagination centered on an overall concern for economic survival and desires for formal education. These findings were a surprise for me. My preliminary studies and readings from authors such as Glassie stimulated my expectations and hopes for narratives filled with creativity and artistic inspiration. I was disappointed. What was not a surprise for me was the discovery of continuing strong cultural foundations in everyday life that emphasize family structure, patriarchal authority, traditional values and the enduring power of carpets.

Downing, Anzul, Ely and Vinz (1997) describe surprises in research as "quite useful and that this excitement of discovery should be one of the hallmarks of qualitative research and it is much more likely to happen when we have left ourselves open to the unexpected, they suggest research questions are provisional" (pp.237-238). These authors confirmed that surprises are to be expected and a valid part of the research process. The understanding that surprises are part of the research process opened my eyes to the unexpected and made me look beyond my many expectations and what I thought should have occurred when I arrived in rural Iran. Accepting the idea of surprises, I began to watch for missing threads between the carpet weaver's

descriptions of a mundane labour-intensive existence and the existence of their creative imagination along with my own narratives

I had expected to find village women weaving from their imagination and found that they were weaving from pre-determined designs made available to them by the contractor. I found the tradition of authentic carpet-weaving had moved from the village to the city where carpet-weaving schools and women of all backgrounds take training to learn to weave carpets even as a leisure activity. In the villages the traditional weaving practices had given way to economic concerns. Perhaps the missing threads between the mundane and creative lies in the institutions where women voluntarily learn to weave as an act of preservation of traditional carpet-weaving. The voluntary women weavers apply themselves to the art of weaving with passion and creativity. In my search for creativity and Glassie's description of carpet weavers I followed every possible link connecting art and creativity with carpet-weaving. I realized the carpet designer is the one who has creative license and is able to put his or her imagination into the carpet. The village carpet weavers are simply the executors - the assemblers who are forced to weave for economic reasons and to follow the designer's templates.

In order to explore the concept of creativity and design license further, I visited the prestigious Carpet Museums of Iran in Tehran. I observed that complicated postmodern designs are delicately woven by artist carpet weavers yet his or her names are not even credited. In the past, the carpet designer's name was never credited but I expected to find accreditation because it was in a museum.

I found other missing threads of artistry hidden in a corner of a bazaar where young adults learned how to design carpets from old masters. I also found art flourishing in a carpet-weaving school and remnants of artistic creativity in carpet museums where carpet narratives were woven by anonymous artists, designers and weavers. Occasionally, as in the cases of museum carpets, the designs came from well-known and respected designers. The design is transferred onto the carpet by an artistic weaver who treats the making of the carpet as an artist's canvas. In one case, the male weaver/artist had the time to put his soul in the carpet, on his own schedule with a salary that freed him from the economic pressure to finish the carpet speedily in order to survive. This, I realized, was a very different narrative from those of the carpet weavers in the village that I studied where the pressures of poverty suppressed their imagination.

From the interviews I conducted in the village, I realized that women carpet weavers imagine their future, imagine the welfare of their children, imagine a better life and imagine that their work is being recognized. They imagine a world with justice where their voices are heard. Badri expressed the sentiment of feeling unrecognized when she said "I think there is no appreciation for carpet weavers in our country and only people like you who come from outside can appreciate it." Rural women carpet weavers live their stories of exploitation and despair which become woven into the carpet. In one interview, Zinat says, "When we were kids we wanted to become somebody but those thoughts were just dreams." She describes the time she spends carpet-weaving as an opportunity to daydream about what might have been. She told me, "I would have liked to be a police officer or work in the army." Zinat's imagination moves back and forth from the past to the future in her daydreams. Her reality as a

weaver is what she is attempting to escape. She dreams about her marriage and her children's future saying "I think about my future and my fiancé. I think about the place I will be moving into when I get married and how I want to decorate it and how I want to raise my children. I don't want my children to be carpet weavers. I'd like them to go to school and get education." She seems trapped in a situation within a society that prevents her from changing her economic status or shaping a more creative future.

In his interview, Pirouz states that he "would do anything but carpet-weaving." Although he is very proud of his first carpet and he is artistic and creative, he doesn't have the opportunity to enjoy that aspect of his personality as a carpet weaver. He wants to be a printmaker because he believes "[printmaking] is like carpet-weaving." He no longer enjoys carpet-weaving because carpet-weaving has become labour for him. About printmaking, he says, "You work with colors and design. You can be creative. I'd like to have my own shop one day." Because the carpet weavers are labourers who produce carpets as dictated by the consumer, the design templates and the middlemen, Pirouz's freedom to use his creativity and imagination is stifled as a carpet weaver. From his perspective, printmaking offers him the opportunity to create from his imagination. Printmaking may be just a dream too. The reality of earning a living as a printmaker might be as mundane.

In Gohar's narrative she talks about not seeing the world in reality because she is blind, she says, "she can imagine" the world around her. Gohar creates an imaginative image of her family's faces. Although she follows prescribed carpet designs, she uses her imagination and her sense of touch to understand the weaving process. Gohar has developed a sense of satisfaction and happiness as a carpet weaver because her

imagination is engaged and her sense of self worth is increased by her achievements. Because she cannot see, her imagination is not limited to merely escaping her surroundings and struggles.

Badri, Gohar's mother, reports abuse when she was a child carpet weaver and also the loss of the man she loved. She accepts her economic status and her daily duties as a punishment from her father for not conforming in the past. She described girls who once visited her village in fancy clothing and says, "That dream never came through because I got married and my husband was even poorer than my parents." She transfers her creative imagination to hopes and wishes for her younger daughter, Marzieh's future. She says "Now, my dream is for my younger daughter, that she gets education and becomes whatever she wants to be and earns good money so she doesn't end up like her mother." Under oppressive conditions of poverty, Badri unconsciously remembers her mother's words, "that carpet is an art" and states "I think carpet-weaving is an art and I really like doing it, but alas, that it does not bring any profit for us."

Omolbani, Badri's mother, expresses a sense of pride in her weaving and recalls her freedom to be creative in years past when she first learned carpet-weaving. She says, "I got better and better with each carpet. My first paid carpet was from someone in Kashan. It was a huge undertaking. After that I worked for ourselves." In the word 'ourselves' Omolbani expresses teamwork and the sense that her weaving was recognized as a contribution to the family. Her weaving enabled her to feed all her children and help her husband to open a small grocery shop. She said, "I liked to weave when I was young and never got tired of weaving." Omolbani's description of her life as a carpet weaver suggests the traditional carpet-weaving allowed for more individual

creativity and independence from middlemen and other authority figures who exploit the craft.

Omolbani comes from a generation when the informal matriarchy or unspoken power of women existed. Although the patriarchy controls many aspects of their lives, underneath that control women's camaraderie and respect for each other is persevered. They continue to learn how to weave from each other and their home is under their control. Only one article in my literature review described the existence of the informal matriarchy in the past. Ghirshman states that "during the Neolithic period, woman's position was higher than the males because she was the productive member of the family and thus the groundwork was laid for the development of the matriarchal system" (Ghirshman, 1957, p.9, in Nikkolgh, 1991, pp.7 & 8).

In the interview process it is obvious that the other women in Badri's extended family respect Omolbani as the informal matriarch. Her carpets represent artifacts or heirlooms which pass on the traditional role of women from one generation to another generation. Soutter (2000) argues that the "heirloom is a special category of artifacts and while meanings of all artifacts shift over time, an heirloom's meaning accrues and resonates over generations, adding patina to the family name" (p.225). Soutter notes that a tortoiseshell locket she possesses is a talisman of a privileged culture that links her to the achievements of her ancestors (p.225). Soutter's insights prompt me to ask the question: Are village carpet weavers aware of the grandmother's carpets as a talisman of a privileged culture that links her to the achievements of her ancestors? I wonder if many carpet-weaving women understand the idea of identification with an heirloom. Badri's husband sold a family heirloom, an old carpet woven by his first

wife's mother. In that action, the family heirloom was not an object that embodied the identity of the group as Soutter describes, with no "usage value nor exchange value" (Soutter, p.17).

Women's Role in the Iranian Carpet Cottage Industry

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iranian society has undergone rapid changes, especially in the social and cultural realm. With the growing impact of globalization, some norms and cultural codes have adapted to modernization, industrialization, and westernization (Tashakkori, 1991, pp.203-217). On the surface Iranian culture is changing with new social classes, values and dynamic responses to international influences. Yet, underneath the surface, tradition and religious foundations hold strong within the family unit.

> There has been a modification of social strata, the emergence of new social classes, new social actors—particularly women, youth and new intellectuals—and new discourses. There has been a dramatic change in demography and family structure, marriage patterns, and divorce, changing urban society, centre and periphery, and social classes and groups (Enayat & Tremayne, 2005, p.62).

Among the changes in Iran are increases of women's participation in higher education. But, in spite of the recent changes in the structure of Iranian society, traditional women's roles continue with underlying cultural codes that strongly influence and dominate the family structure, social norms and daily behaviors. The family is still a patriarchal structure where the roles and rights of women within the Iranian society are strictly adhered to. In past generations, marriage was a serious business transaction dictating a woman's future and affecting the status of the whole family. Although many

young women in Iran have more choice finding suitable marriage partners, the tradition that marriage affects the whole family strongly influences their choices. Nassehi-Behnam states that the traditional family in Iran continues to be based on male supremacy. He states that the traditional family

> ...rigorously preserves its belief in the hierarchy, unity, and cohesiveness of the domestic group. Apart from gender, the hierarchy is built upon the respect due to age and experience. Marriage concerns not only two individuals but also two lineages. It plays a pivotal role in the maintenance of the social system, based on the kinship network, and therefore the community must maintain control over such an important transaction. Thus the arrangement of a marriage is accompanied by great deliberations amongst family members and lengthily preparations (2007, p.557).

In past generations, Iranian women always had major roles in the economic survival of the family. Weaving among women villagers was one of many economic activities that centered on the domestic division of labour and that sustained families. Carpet production was usually more for home use and local gift exchange than for direct market sale. The women carpet weaver's contribution was once supplementary but in recent decades it has become the household's main source of income. In the past, women not only contributed through the making of crafts, they also were the bearers of culture and heritage. Through their familial roles and their crafts, women achieved pride and identity. The integration of Iran into the global market economy and the expansion of capitalism increased demands and changed the nature of the home-based cottage industries (Ghvamshahidi, 1995, pp 135-151). In the present study, the women in Abdol's carpet-weaving family are now forced to become simply labourers. From Omolbani's generation to Zinat's generation, the nature of creative imagination and identity as economic contributors has shifted dramatically. Omolbani knew she was a

strong contributor to the children and her husband's welfare. Zinat does not express that same sense of contribution or the same pride in her work.

In interviews with Zinat, Pirouz, and Babak, each describes a life of exploitation and economic struggle. Badri, Abdol's second wife, rebelled as a young woman resisting the shifting role of the woman from traditional matriarch to exploited labour. She comes from the generation when globalization rippled silently through the country, creating changes in family values, social structure and economic power. On the positive side of the equation, globalization may have been the influence that brought opportunity to Gohar. Blindness works for her advantage because not seeing enables her to cope with the despair of the other family members by allowing her to find a sense of value and achievement in Mrs. Tohidi's workshop. Mrs. Tohidi because of her financial wealth, not because of her matriarchal role, maintains her dignity, independence and ability to contribute to others. Grandmother Omolbani, a traditional woman, takes great pride in her contribution to the family and during the interview was recognized by the other women as a center of strength and wisdom.

It is notable that extremes of women's roles sit side-by-side in their narratives. At one end of the spectrum, Badri and Zinat are totally discouraged with their present situation. In the center of the spectrum, Mrs. Tohidi and Gohar reflect some positive aspects of modern eras and are able to use the opportunities of cooperatives and technology to advance themselves. At the other end of the spectrum, a female cousin does not weave, therefore was not included in the research. She sits at her computer planning to travel away from the village to attend university.

Does Glassie's View of the Carpet Weaver Really Exist?

Glassie describes the carpet weaver as an artist whose soul weaves the carpet. He says, when the weaver places on the warp one fuzzy, colored knot that will join thousands of others to make a design she holds in her mind, "[t]he moment in which she translates herself into wool, when thought becomes material..." (Glassie, 1993, p.51). Glassie acknowledges vertical social associations as the weaver learned from her mother when she was young. She honors her as her teacher and works "as one in the sisterhood of weavers..." (p.51). As the carpet weaver continues the act of creation by tying the knots she reaches backward in time to her learning and cultural icons, and brings the narratives forward to create a three dimensional artifact. Reaching backward, the weaver's act recollects the whole of her biography. Glassie says,

> Her carpet's harmonious coloring remembers an early moment when she crawled around the loom and played with the scraps of wool from which she extracted a palette of hues: three reds, two blues, gold and white. The carpet's technique reflects her learning and her mother. The pattern is one of the types that are emblems of her village and region (p.53).

Just as the narrative always changes and always shifts the weaver changes to meet the needs of the moment that is also changing. Glassie continues, "Through the particulars of her biography, the life of a young woman in an agricultural village assembles cultural history, and then history swings forward as she imagines the future" (p.53). The finished carpet means many things to the young girl. The carpet represents "distinct sets of relations" within each of which there is significance: "a context of concentration...of learning...of teaching...of co-operation...of technology...of memory...of hope..." (p.54). It is here, in the multiple contexts of creation that meaning begins when it leaves the weavers' hands.

In this research project, I became aware of a gap between Glassie's description of the creative, artistic weaver and my experience in a rural village in Iran. Yes, I found creativity and art but I also found misery and despair. It seems Glassie's romantic version of carpet-weaving exists only in brief moments when the weaver forgets the struggle, the physical pain and the injustices of exploitation. Gohar has wonderful imaginary moments, Omolbani proudly describes periods of satisfaction from her weaving days but Zinat and her two brothers weave for practical, economic reasons. The missing thread is the reason an artist creates. It's the reason the artist works that brings forth passion, pride and satisfaction. If the reason to weave is economic survival and creative license is withdrawn, artistic imagination suffers. The carpet becomes meaningless to the labourer who cannot see anything beyond mundane existence.

The carpets lose their mundane narrative and gain more meaning when they leave the weaver's hands. Once the completed carpet is removed from its originating environment, "out of conceptual context" to another environment it becomes something else (Glassie, p.61). Carpets embedded with tradition and cultural meanings are sent to the bazaar. They become export commodities yet always hold hidden within them the context that changes in meaning and symbolism, from a symbol of the carpet weaver's memory, imagination and hopes - to a symbol of the new owner's status, artistry appreciation and consumption. Do village carpet weavers create their meanings and identities in dreams of a future that does not exist? Do they project hope onto religious icons and ceremonies? Do weavers project their hopes on modern technology and new materials not necessarily cultural because they promise to fulfill their wishes and dreams? My research experience questions Glassie's romantic version of female carpet

weavers creating artifacts and heirlooms filled with cultural history and creative passion. I went to Iran inspired by Glassie's description of the carpet weaver. Now I wonder: does Glassie's 1999 view of the carpet weaver really still exist in 2006? Carpet weavers may understand that the carpet is a human built artifact representing their region but in their daily labour weavers do not claim the layers of history, tradition and cultural stories embedded in the carpet because they are weaving to please someone else. When the carpet leaves Iran, it becomes an object of beauty and luxury which does not convey the suffering and poverty of the weaver. The carpet may not express the weaver's perceived relationship with the outside world.

Material Culture and Identity

Material culture represents the study of the human built environment. The material culture concept suggests that objects and images can be used to describe relations between people and the world they inhabit. Societies carry their collective identity through the generations by passing down icons, defects and materials. The artifacts, the surroundings and processes used in daily life are significant reminders and re-enforcers of cultural values and beliefs. Human ecologists value the fact that individuals develop their sense of self and identity through their interaction with individuals, family members and significant objects of their near environment.

In Iran, I observed the carpet weavers near environment and the carpet as it moved away to the market environments. I followed the carpet narratives from the weaver's bench in Abdol's home and the village workshops, to the bazaars and back again to Ikea in Canada. Placed in the context of the history and economics of the

carpet-weaving tradition in Iran, I explored the "public and private space" of the carpets, where I discovered stories that contained a dynamic tension of relationships between the carpet's economic meaning and the carpet's significance. At the personal end of the spectrum are stories of mine and the weavers' identity and home, history and community, exile and displacement, communication, cultural and traditional values, and carpets as narrative. If the carpet is woven and remains at home, it communicates one narrative, communicating past and experience directly. Even at a distance, with the intervening filters of the middlemen and marketplace, it still has a narrative that evokes something else, be it memory or imagination. The carpet convinces the consumer to add their own narrative as expressed by their possessions. The story transforms as the carpet enters community space where the carpet acts as sources of prestige and as collateral for young women carpet weavers' dowries. The narratives of carpet weavers become lost when the consumer purchases it. Lived narratives of economic struggle and oppression transform into completely different stories that are conditioned by romanticism and the global marketplace's search for authenticity. Marketing and hype in the international marketplace extends into the village economy where the village carpet becomes merely a source of income and no longer holds the prestige of an authentic village-made carpet as it is seen in the West.

The carpet's narrative, as a text and a fragment of the spatial and temporal whole (Glassie, p.63), can be broken down into parts and read as parts belonging to a whole composition. The whole composition contains the story of the carpet's movement from 'Abdol's family', through the hands of the shearer and merchants into the warehouses in another country and finally on to the floor of a person's home. Once the carpet leaves

the weaver's hands, the weaver becomes anonymous and their stories remain untold. Understanding the carpet's narratives works the same way as language, where one word has a richer meaning when put into the context of other words. Things and words are empty in isolation. They are meaningful when placed in the context. The weaver is like the lone motif on a carpet that means little, but rather, it is the assembly of motifs on the rug creates a shape (Glassie, p.47).

Carpet as Metaphor

"Carpets are a text. Rather than being simply a reflection of something in society, they represent a tradition with its own independent dynamic" (Geertz, 1976, as cited in Spooner, 1986, p.231). By identifying the carpet as a metaphor that weaves narratives together, the vertical warp begins to represent life structures and foundational mores and the horizontal weft signifies changing influences and transitions (see *Figure 5* on page 206). The knots, color and pile represent individual narratives built on foundations, adapting to changing environments. The three dimensional structure of the narratives weave complex meanings into the carpet and integrate designs which begin to appear as each thread is knotted and then woven into place.

The warp structures the size and shape of the carpet and metaphorically represents the socio-economic and cultural foundations that individuals are unable to control. The weft yarn weaves over and under the warp holding knots of colored wool in place. The weft moves through the foundation warp thread representing transitions and influences in individual lives, societies and environments, in context. The knots

represent the weaver's individualism because the tension and how tightly they are tied is individual. Only the knots are controlled by the weaver's scissors, the weaver's mastery and the tension of the weaver's hand. The colors represent cultural influences that dictate the designs and the pattern template. Another subtle consideration of the carpet narrative is the pile which when trimmed accents the depth of the designs and patterns. The final outcome is a complex surface, deep and rich and always changing: a metaphor for the individual, family and regional narratives woven together to create a three dimensional work of art.

As I read and re-read the field texts and my journal notes, common threads occurred and resonated across the co-participants' narratives. I recognized many metaphors and connecting threads that appeared and reappeared throughout the family's stories. Some threads and metaphors became apparent more frequently than others. Metaphors helped me contemplate the journey, by linking the common threads between me and the co-participants in my study. By choosing the most frequently appearing threads in Zinat's, Badri's, Gohar's, Pirouz's, Babak's and Omolbani's interviews, I combined that information with the strongest, most central metaphor, the carpet.

The *Figure 5* on page 206 shows a metaphor for the central concepts embedded in both the carpet weavers' lives and the carpets. The foundation concepts are conditions that create a framework that are beyond the carpet weavers' control. The warp threads do not move or change; the weft threads are constantly changing, moving in and out, over and under, backward and forward. Across the bottom of the *Figure 5*, the warp threads are labeled with underlying threads that reverberate throughout each family member's narratives. The threads of economic survival, traditional and cultural

values; women's roles, weaving skills, family and social structure reoccurred frequently.

The weft threads are labeled with descriptors of the influences that affect a village weaver's life. Globalization, power and the authority of outsiders are the influences that affect opportunities for education, creativity and imagination for the carpet weavers. As the carpet evolves, increasing numbers of weft threads are pushed into place, securing the colorful pile knots tightly. The weaver alone controls the tension of the knots and the number of weft threads but not the design. The weft threads weave through the warp reflecting back to the weaver changes, transitions and growth, but also reflecting back the weaver's inability to change the design of their lives. Members of the carpet-weaving family I interviewed complained that economic conditions and lack of education forces them to engage in carpet-weaving labour and as a result imaginative creation suffers. It is the weft threads that create the pattern, not the warp threads. The carpet's tension becomes a metaphor for both control and lack of control.

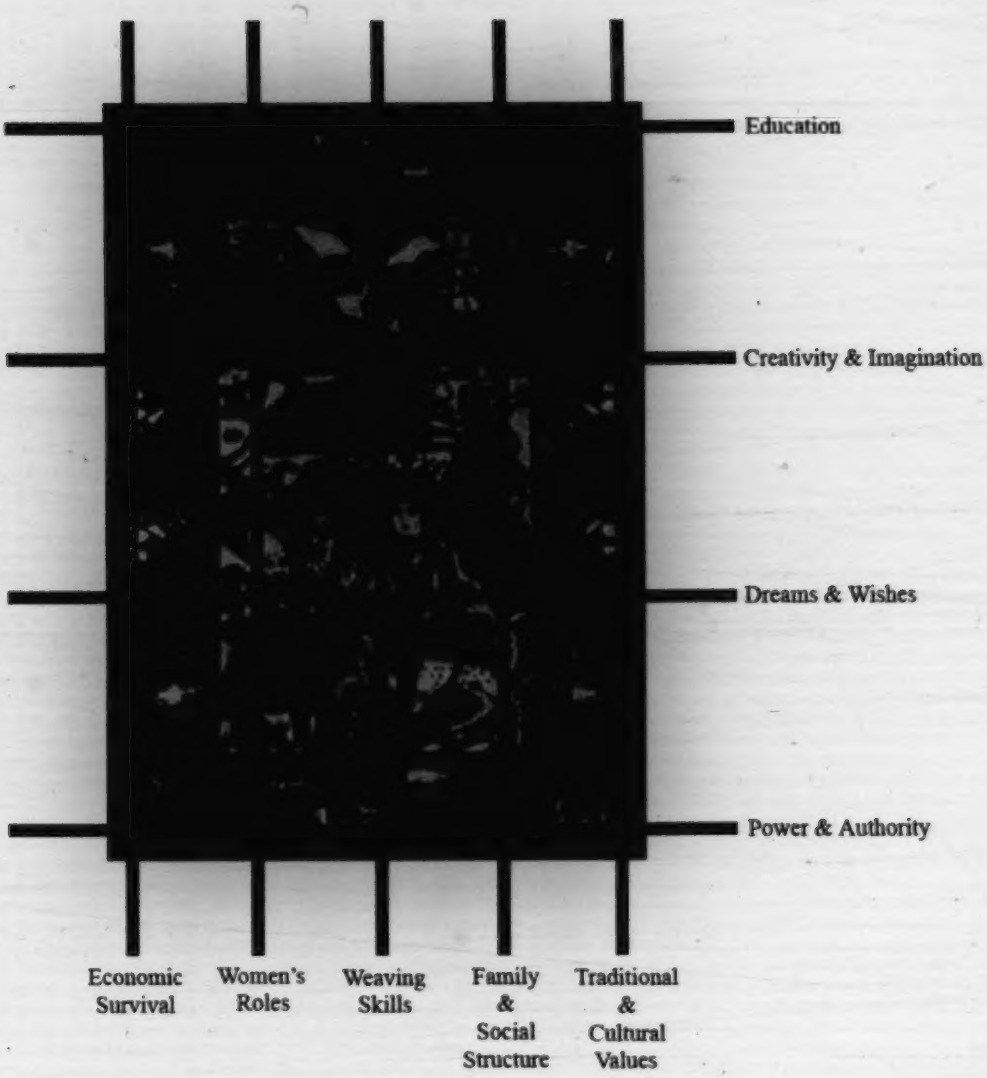


Figure 5. Warp and weft metaphorical illustration (Khorrami, 2007).

Today, in Iran carpet weavers are merely assemblers and their dreams, wishes and memories are buried in the beautiful motifs and patterns treasured by others who are unaware of the carpet weaver's mundane labour-intensive existence. The warp and weft, textures and colors juxtapose against each other to create a completed textile that embodies the human spirit.

The first warp thread in *Figure 5* is labeled economic survival. The warp threads representing economic survival include food, shelter, clothing and income. Among weavers interviewed, economic struggle is a constant theme and poverty is a condition they cannot control. The women's concerns about economic survival reappear throughout the interviews as past memories, as present worries and as future concerns. Badri recalled that in the past "most parents rented their under-aged children to these home workshops for a year without the knowledge of the authorities because they needed the money and the children were good sources of money for them." Her statement demonstrates how children grow up in an environment of economic necessity. Zinat explained that she had to "quit school in order to weave in order to make a living." Pirouz says that he would do "anything but carpet-weaving." He stated, "...if we get paid it will be a small percentage that is only a survival wage." Babak, as a young boy, described his excitement when a carpet was sold. He says "We never feel attached to the work we do because it is not going to be ours to begin with. People who profit are bazaari's."

The next foundation warp thread in *Figure 5* is the women's role. In the village where I conducted my research, women are still strictly controlled by the male patriarchs who even affected the way I conducted the interviews. For example, to

adhere to proper protocols, it became necessary for me to travel with my brother-in-law so he could negotiate with the men on my behalf. During the course of the field work, the women I interviewed often alluded to the domination of the males, even though they didn't feel comfortable talking about it. Zinat's idea about marriage as a means of escape from her situation, the absent daughter, Parvaneh's secret closet and Badri's acceptance of domestic abuse all signify the impact of a patriarchal society. Even though Badri's father exercised his authority by refusing to allow her to be married to the person she loved, his wife, Omolbani, expressed equality in her relationship with her husband. Badri said "I didn't really choose my husband. We didn't have any rights to choose our husband. It was all arranged." Omolbani allowed her husband to control Badri's life which indicates that Omolbani did not question the patriarchal authority. Although Omolbani perceived herself to be a strong contributor through her carpet-weaving she still belonged to the women of that era where men's work and women's work were separated. Later in her life, men also became involved in the carpet-weaving because it often became the family's only source of income. Although the present generation has more freedom and the gender roles are blurring, the patriarchal hierarchy remains in control of many aspects of women's lives in the rural areas.

A woman's weaving skills are placed next on *Figure 5* as a structural warp thread in the carpet metaphor. The carpet industry is one of the foundations of the Iranian economy. Carpet exporting is the second largest industry in Iran, after oil. Each region is known for specific designs yet regional designs are replicated outside of their boundaries because of market demand. The family of my study in Abu Zeyd Abad wove from Qom and Kashan's designs. Carpets are produced in urban workshops or

village home-based operations where the whole family is usually involved. The majority of villagers depend on carpet production for their livelihood yet the carpet weavers cannot afford to buy their own carpets. Ironically on their floors, lie commercially woven carpets. When an individual is born into a carpet-weaving family their future is already determined. The inevitability of becoming a weaver is out of their control. From my observations, discussions in Tehran with carpet merchants and conversations with Mrs. Tohidi it, became obvious that the family in the study is not unlike other carpet-weaving families scattered all over Iran. In these families, children are exposed to weaving at their mother or their grandmother's side. On occasion, the children are sent to weave with an '*ostad*' [master craftsperson] in a workshop or another household. Although Badri wanted to be a hairdresser she accepted her life as a weaver. She said, "Once you are born a carpet weaver you will always be a carpet weaver." Zinat was born into a family of carpet weavers which also dictated her destiny. She described her early training by other members of the family as follows,

> I was about 5 or 6 years old when I first sat by my mother's loom and watched her weave. Sometimes she would give me wool to untangle. My mother gradually taught me how to *rishezadan* [*how to start weaving the weft threads through the warp on the loom, and to add the pile*]. After I lost my mother in the fire, I sat by my father and grandmother and watched them weave.
>
> When I was learning from my grandmother she wove only from a design, but she told us that during her time, before even my mother was born, she wove carpets from her imagination.

Omolbani, the eldest woman in the study, was trained in weaving by an older related woman. She said, "One day my father took my hand and took me to this old woman and told her - she's yours, you be her *ostad* and do what you want to do." Omolbani recalls teaching her children to weave. She said, "when my daughters grew a

bit older I taught them how to weave and if they didn't weave ten rows I wouldn't let them go."

Badri was nine years old when she started weaving and soon after that her father hired her out to a workshop. Badri was a talented weaver. As a result, even after reporting the *'ostads'* abuse, they beat her but they didn't fire her. Her work was valuable to them. Mrs. Tohidi describes those who are more talented than others. She said weavers must be creative and talented using the weaving tools, noting that sometimes young weavers are more talented than more experienced weavers. Mrs. Tohidi's work with blind weavers, such as Gohar, provides facilities for visually challenged individuals - an under utilized labour source. In all the narratives in this study, carpet-weaving is essential in order to survive economically. The earlier a child learns the skills - the sooner he or she can contribute to the family income.

The importance of family ties and social mores is the fourth foundational warp thread in *Figure 5*, because many beliefs and values have not changed over the generations. The extended family kinship relationships and the bond between siblings reoccurs a number of times in the study. Babak, the youngest boy in the study, is one of the best examples of family closeness. In the photos taken by participants, family members were given an opportunity to take as many photos as they wanted. Each one of them carefully selected the images that were highly significant to them. Babak only chose one topic to photograph and that was his brother, Pirouz. He said about the photo,

> I like my brother a lot and he is my older brother and I look up to him. We also work together everyday on the same bench. We are almost inseparable. If I don't see him for a while I will miss him and I feel that part of me is missing.

> I am close to my sisters but I can't talk to them about everything. I can talk to Pirouz. He is my brother and my friend.

One of Badri's photographs was of family members visiting and sitting around the main room together. Zinat's photograph of the '*tanoor*' [bread oven] is also an example of the importance of family ties because the entire family makes flat bread together.

Traditional beliefs and cultural values is the fifth foundation in Figure 5 warp thread because tradition and culture weave strongly throughout the family narratives and my visit to Iran. There are also narrative threads where the infiltration of modern lifestyles juxtaposed with traditional practices. For example, there was the instance where I sat in a fast food mall and watched the traditional pilgrim's picnic (p.96). Another example was Mrs. Tohidi who lives in Qom, living a lifestyle that breaks from the traditional woman's role. Mrs. Tohidi is an entrepreneur and has the freedom to travel and make decisions without seeking permission from her husband. At the same time Omolbani remains in the village, upholding the traditional values and beliefs. Each woman is strong and proud, yet they represent different aspects of the Iranian traditional and cultural mores. Mrs. Tohidi dresses covered and respectful. She follows her religious doctrine and expects proper behavior from the weavers, yet she is an entrepreneur in the modern sense. Omolbani wears the *chador* and adheres strictly to the traditional role of the woman. Omolbani and Mrs. Tohidi are both entrepreneurs from different locations, different environments and different times.

In the study, obvious symbols of traditionalism and cultural values are the women's descriptions of marriage and dowries. Marriage and dowries play an important role in Iranian women's lives. For example, Zinat talked about using her saved money and limited free time "to go to Kashan's bazaar and... buy stuff for [her]

dowry." Zinat's stepmother, Badri, discussed how important the dowry carpet was to her. Badri even assembled her own carpet design with the help of a designer. She talked about the deer, lions, canary and old traditional figures that depict the kings, the soldiers and the building of the Achamenids Empire era that she wove into her carpet. Badri described her dowry carpet in great detail because she identified with the images of the shy deer and the figures of *Takht-e-Jamshid* soldiers because they represented her country's history. Badri's mother, Omolbani, and Badri emphasized the importance of tradition and cultural values in their family as indicated by Badri's photos. She chose to share an image of Imam Ali and says, "I like Imam Ali...I like celebration because it brings happiness..."

Horizontally, the weft threads in *Figure 5*, symbolize aspects of the narrations that the weavers believe they can use to change their lives. The first of the strongest weft threads in *Figure 5* is education. In the study, each generation views education as an opportunity for betterment. The boys and the girls both have very little education because they had to leave school to become weavers. Badri learned about reading and writing from her siblings. Her only formal education was weaving. Her mother, Omolbani, prepared her to become a weaver. All the women, except Omolbani and Gohar, dreamt about their children receiving an education. Gohar is getting an education because of Mrs. Tohidi. Education weaves through the warp of economic survival, family and social structure, women's roles, weaving skills and traditional and cultural values.

The second weft thread in *Figure 5* that weaves through the carpet warps are the threads of creativity and imagination. Glassie (1993) states that village carpet-weaving

is an expression of an art form because the weavers simply weave into their carpets their own imagination. He states that weavers are inspired by their surroundings yet in this study only Gohar and Omolbani spoke positively of creative self-expression. Zinat, Pirouz, Babak and Badri struggled with the notion of artistic expression in carpet-weaving because the economic survival of the family was foremost. They learned to detach themselves from the creativity as the carpet would soon leave their hands. On the other hand, carpet-weaving, for Badri, was a distraction from her daily mundane chores.

The third horizontal weft thread represents the co-participant's dreams, wishes and memories which travel backwards and forward, inward and outward, and are a three dimensional aspect of co-participants' narratives. In the carpet weavers' lives, dreams, wishes and memories guide and inspire them to create a more fulfilling life. Zinat protects herself from her mundane insignificant daily routine by imagining a better future. Pirouz's and Bakak's memories of their mother's courage give them a point of reference filled with strength and a sense of identity with a hero who saved their lives. Each weaver's dreams, wishes and memories are weft threads, subject to change, that move through the warp threads creating places of tension and places of hope in the carpet.

The final weft thread in *Figure 5* signifies power and authority. This thread also weaves in and out, over and under, representing the oppressive patriarch and the protective patriarch at the same time. Zinat, Badri and Omolbani each respect those who represent power and authority in Iran. Zinat wants to be a police officer. Badri reported abuse and child labour to the officials. Omolbani spoke proudly about selling

her carpets to the son of a colonel and members of the wealthy upper class. The authority of the father also affected each of these women, especially Badri whose father refused to allow her to be married to the man she loved. Parvaneh, the absent daughter, wielded power in the household with her private closet.

The grid diagram overlaid on the carpet image represents the warp and the weft thread relationships. As the knots and weft threads interlock with the warps, the completed design unfolds into a grand narrative with spatial and temporal dimensions of both the co-participants and me. When the weaving is complete, the weaver stands back and observes the finished product, just as the researcher stands back and observes the experience. I am reminded of the saying I once heard, "you can't see the picture if you are in the frame." By distancing myself from the research I gain a larger perspective and other more personal threads reveal themselves as metaphors such as my connection with water, birds and photography.

Metaphoric Threads Connecting Me to Home

The carpet is the most predominant metaphor to emerge in this study while many other metaphoric threads reflected between my co-participants and me. Metaphors create the scaffolding around the carpet narratives and arise in the study as supportive sounds, sights and memories in my life. In the study, metaphors such as the sound of birds, the sights of the *Shahr-e-farange* and the memories connected to flowing water reflected back to me aspects of my identity, my home and my family. Birds are one of the connections I have with my home and my childhood because they

have a special place in my life. In Canada, I care for ten doves which all fly free in my bedroom. While I am sleeping, they walk all over me and torment me until I wake up. In Iran, as a child, the sound of doves cooing soothed me while I slept on the roof at my grandparents' home. When I was a child in Iran, the sound of baby chicks disturbed my sleep. I had three baby chicks that I played with during the day. I went to a street vendor with my grandmother and bought them. I asked my grandmother to put them in her large closet at night because they were so noisy when I was trying to sleep. I kept the chicks until they grew larger and became too difficult to care for. I did not want them to be butchered, so I asked my grandmother to take them back to the vendor where we bought them. She put them in a big basket and took them back, but the vendor thought my grandmother was in need of money so he was going to sell them for her. She told him the story about my growing away from the chicks and he gladly took them back.

During my research, my childhood love for birds subtly reoccurred. Zinat's photograph of the family's chickens and her description of the chickens as family pets reminded me of my three chicks. The bird metaphor lay unnoticed until I reviewed the interview transcripts, where I found Badri's woven bird figures in her dowry carpet and recalled one of Qom's regional designs is a bird figure. The sound of birds singing connected me to Canada while I was in Iran and to Iran while I live in Canada. Birds, cooing and chirping, make me feel at home.

Another important metaphor that connected me with my childhood in Iran is the *Shahr-e-farang* with the peepholes that allowed children to see images of the outside world. Through the camera viewfinder, I continuously repeated the experience of the

Shahr-e-farang as I searched for images of the outside world that reflected back to me my life's lived experiences reminiscing the past and imagining the future. Like the operator of the *Shahr-e-frang* who mechanically advances the film reel, I, too, with each crank of the film winder on the camera, advance an experience of "remembered past to the present moment in another, all the while imaginatively constructing an identity for the future" (Clandinin, 2000, p.55).

Water is a metaphor for the memories that weave gently and fondly through my mind. Water is like my bloodline connecting me to Iran. In Canada, I find a sense of home near a local stream. The stream that flowed near my home before I immigrated away from Iran connected me to nature and to the earth. When I visit the creek near my Canadian home I am no longer groundless. I sit on a rock and close my eyes and listen to the flow of the water. As I listen to the water, I travel back in time and place, in memory, to my room in our house in Iran that no longer exists. I hear the same sounds and I merge my thoughts with the flow of the stream. Sometimes the water flows fast and I watch the struggle as the water passes by a large rock, moving over and under, right and left, I think about many struggles and transitions that I had gone through in adapting to a new home and about the carpet weavers moving their threads over and under, right and left.

My birds make me feel at home. My photography allows me to capture the world around like the sights of the *Shahr-e-farange* and the water brings back my memories and reconnects me to who I am. The carpet's narrative changes once it crosses the ocean, just as my narrative transforms in a new country. The collection of metaphors; the carpet, the birds, the *Shahr-e-farang* and the water mirror back to me the

past and present, and open up for me future storylines and a hybrid identity.

Narrative Mirrors and Reflections

Self identification arises from the place we are born and the people we are born to. Identity, for the purposes of this dissertation, refers to individual sense of self and importance. Iranian village women are expected to be carpet weavers from early childhood because of the family that they are born into. As a narrative inquirer, my role was to collect stories of the carpet-weaving family in order to compose field texts and translate those field texts into research texts. By doing this, I mirrored the stories of carpet weavers so that they could recognize, claim and transform their own narratives. At the same time that I reflected their narratives, I was also recognizing myself within their stories. Zinat, Gohar and Badri's stories reflect back fragments of my own narrative. I am aware that my story is shaped by my childhood experiences and influenced by the personal and professional roles I have adopted in adulthood, which affects the composition of field texts. I am intrigued by the concept of stories and photographs as ways of making meaning.

While each of the co-participants drew me into my past life in Iran, Omolbani reflected back the strongest. She was the last person I interviewed and she stimulated many memories and tugged at my heart. She reminded me of my childhood and both of my grandmothers. I recognized Omolbani's hard work and strength which I saw in my father's mother and her sense of traditionalism was similar to my mother's mother. My fondest memories of my grandmother become vivid when my father tells me stories of

his mother's courage and strength. Like Omolbani, my father's mother raised eight children. My memory of my father's mother is very short because I was ten years old when she died, but I remember her as a very strong woman who dedicated her life to her children. I remember her making rice in a big copper pot underneath which she had to use logs to make a fire. I remember her washing the family's clothes during the cold days of winter in her yard by her small frozen pond. She boiled water to mix it with cold water and then she rinsed the clothes through a hole in the cold pond.

Omolbani's sense of traditionalism and holding together her family also reflects my mother's mother with whom I lived with for four years while attending university. She was a traditional woman who adhered to family and cultural values. Since family kinship is one of the strongest foundations of Iranian culture, my grandmother always made sure to fulfill her role as an elder in attending to the family's affairs and maintaining her cultural values. My mother's mother was a slender woman with dark hair who wore thick glasses. She was always by her *samovar* smoking a cigarette. She was quiet yet at times she could be very vocal. She was a well-spoken woman who would talk to us in a soft feminine voice with a conviction. Her sense of traditionalism and family values made her house like a nest and attracted many birds! The house was always full of family and friends who stayed at her house for several days not just on special occasions, but also because they felt welcomed at her house, where they were generously fed and taken care of. When I was a child and living outside Tehran where my grandparents were living, our arrival occasionally coincided with the arrival of my aunt and her family who came to stay with my grandparents during the summer time.

When we visited my grandparents during the summer school break, we often slept on the roof of their big house. When I was still living in Iran, it was very common to sleep on the flat roofs during the hot summer nights. Today, those flat roofs are utilized as open patios, where people spend evenings relaxing and serving their guests. My grandmother had enough sleeping mattresses, blankets and pillows for everyone. Adults would haul the bedding up the narrow wooden ladder to the roof and the children would take some iced water and sometimes fresh fruit. We camped out on the roof, giggling for a while and then falling sleep to the murmur of adults gossiping. Some nights when everybody was asleep and I was still awake, I would lie flat on my back and count the stars. Like Zinat, I created a private space in my imagination where no one else had access. I felt free as a bird. I carried my imagination to the following nights as if my imagination held an unfinished story. The sky and how the stars were created and why the stars were not falling down to our roof fascinated me. In the morning, I would wake up to the sound of coo-cooing of the doves, the cawing of the crows and the piercing hot rays of the sun.

Like Pirouz, who treasured his childhood moments with his cousin, as I awoke on the roof, I looked forward to another day playing with my cousins again. In the narratives I also identified with Zinat as she waited for a place she could call home because I, too, often feel like a visitor in Canada, much the same way that she feels like a visitor in her father's home. She is waiting to find her own family and her own home. I understand how she feels. As a child I felt at home in Iran but now I am a visitor there. As a teenager I was rebellious, and listening to Badri's narrative about her young rebellious days, I recognized myself and how I, too, rebelled against many of the

traditional expectations for young ladies. Now, like Badri, I have become respectful of traditional holidays and celebrations for the pleasure of gathering with family and enjoying good food. Badri reminded me of how I rejected the Iranian cultural traditions until I moved far away. Today, in Canada, I embrace the carpets, the flavors of the Iranian foods and the traditions that no longer bind and restrain me - instead they cover me like a warm safe blanket. Reverence for the carpet is one of my attempts to fill the void caused by absence from friends and family, and my disconnection from my homeland.

Transitions and Voids

A void is an empty space, a vacuum. In times of transition, I have been forced to let go of past ways of living before my new ways have yet been established. I find the ground disappearing beneath my feet and I flounder without anything solid to cling to, as if the vacancy in my life consumes my space and I am floating without roots. In my life, there have been stages of adjustment to my new homes. The first stage is a struggle to adjust and accept the new environment, then a second stage of flourishing and proving the self-worth occurs and then a third stage of metamorphosis and silence shadows my life. It is the last stage where one sees no return to the homeland and the glorification of return becomes hopeless yet the longing for a sense of the homeland and identity intensifies. Yet my alienated, displaced and marginalized identity softens as I become a person who tries to fill the nameless void between the walls on a house by decorating with cultural icons and filling the surroundings with smells, touches and sights that vibrate with the past associations. Being cut off from the material and

symbolic representations of the past, I try to reconstruct and preserve those memories in a mythical form that becomes like a life map reminding me of my absent identity.

In times of transition my life contains a void or an empty space created by the vacuum of displacement where I am letting go of the idea of returning to Iran and determining what new experiences I will allow to form my new identity. As I let go of the old 'home' I left behind, it is hard for me not to turn back to that which I have always known. Although I am feeling groundless and confused, I also realize that I must remain open to new possibilities and gain insight from my past and present experiences. In reconciling to my search for a place on earth where I am grounded, I question my identity and my connection to my homeland. My memories of home float in my dreams on a distant surface, like stars that do not fall on the ground.

Symbolically, when I first arrived in Iran to conduct the present research, I visited my past home which is now built above the ground. Years ago, it used to be on the ground now it floats like I do, hovering with the same groundlessness. My more recent observations from the journey to Iran and my research experiences are yet another narrative and another memory that now resides within me. As I revisit my feelings of displacement, concepts of migration and transition and the myth of a return home that would have been a reunion with the past, dilemmas of understanding arise: what is my meaning of home and how do I to find my sense of belonging?

When I feel displaced, I seek ways to retain social and cultural attributes from my past that help me adjust to an uncertain future in a private exile. I am first associated with my ethnicity. No matter 'who' I am because I speak with my accented English, I am looked upon as a foreigner. Because of my complexion I cannot be associated with

European foreigners, but someone from the Middle East. I can be easily discriminated against. The only time that I feel I am complete and know who I am is when I am behind my camera. My work speaks for me and the camera's viewfinder is the gateway through which I can open many closed doors. As a visual artist when I hear a word I see a picture in my mind's eye first. I bring many personal meanings and desires to my photographs.

Through photography, the images I choose to freeze in time with the click of the shutter become part of my identity just as the carpet weaver's identity becomes embedded in the weaving process and the woven designs. The visual moments that inspire me to take a photograph are connected to my memories just as a carpet weaver sometimes weaves designs from memory simply because they have woven the same design so many times. The beauty of the carpet contrasts with the darkness of the carpet weavers' world where concerns of survival, exploitation and seemingly hopeless future cast shadows on the loom. The shadows of transition, immigration adjustments, homesickness and searching for a new meaning of home hide in my photographs just like the shadows of the exploited and unrecognized weaver hide in the piles of the carpet.

I frequently photograph in black and white capturing images of marginalized people on the periphery of society. When I was asked why I use mainly black and white images, I answer, "Because there is no color in their life". In Abdol's carpet-weaving family their minds, their bodies, their spirits and their hearts are consumed by the carpets. The soul of the family is in the carpet. In their lives I found another mundane existence and I photographed the mundane. I took the photographs in colour

to capture colorful designs in the carpets. I have always photographed others who reflected my experience back to me because "Art offers life; it offers hope; it offers the prospect of discovery; it offers light... Art enables us to imagine, to extend, and to renew" (Greene, 1995, p.132-3). I imagine carpet weavers hope someone will notice them and their contribution as preservers of cultural artifacts. In my photography I am stating, "Look at me, look at who I am."

When I photograph, I envisage my dreams, wishes and memories. Under the umbrella of the family generations, the art of making the carpet and the stories woven into the carpet moves through a spatial time frame from the past to the present and into the future. This spatial movement of narrative and artistic creation within the generations of Abdol's rural carpet-weaving family resonates with my life as a woman photographer/artist who has been removed from one culture and re-located in another culture that promotes visibility, a place where I keep going back and forth to bring the past into the present and question my identity. Looking at the carpet as a metaphor, my narrative inquiry is driven by the central question of identity: the identity of the woman weaving the carpet and my identity embedded in both the carpet as a visual artifact and a woven thread of a culture to which I belong. I reclaimed my connection with Iran in the carpet's rich library of spatial narrative from which I had once been estranged, and I developed a strong desire to reread and give significance to the carpet, particularly as a woman and a visual artist, and to give voice to women's lived experiences that would otherwise remain unheard.

I identify with the carpets and the carpet weaver's existence because, in the carpet weavers' narratives, the carpet has become only a consumer product. I am

reminded of Greene's (1995) statement: "Their imagination is placed within the fixed framework of the loom. While their dreams are woven in the warp and weft of the carpet, it is also an alternative to gloom or feelings of pointlessness" (Greene, p.124).

As a result of my travels, I have a multinational identity stemming from immersion in many cultures, but it is my foundation that is rooted in Iran where I learned to be the person I am today and no matter where I live, I am who I am with multiple diversities and a multiple personhood. "We create our identities in the situations of our lives" (Green, 1995, p.51). I realize that my sense of 'belonging' is not necessarily born of one city or a single cultural identity— that sometimes the essence of 'home' can be found in the lingering spirit, heritage and love of family. My parents are my home.

In summary and through my experience listening and stimulating narratives from three generations, I explored my ancestry and identity. I saw myself in Zinat and her dreams of her own family, and I saw another self in her stepsister and stepmother, then I saw my grandmother in Badri's mother. I found another place to call home, at least temporarily.

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Appendix A: Information Sheet for Participants

Title: An Arts-based Narrative Inquiry of a Rural Carpet-Weaving Family in Iran

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Introduction

I would like to introduce myself to you and tell you about my research. My name is Sima Khorrami and I am a doctoral student at the University of Alberta in Canada. I was born and lived in Iran for half of my life and then moved to England to study photography. After my graduation I moved to Canada and have been living in Edmonton, Alberta, since 1981. I worked as a professional photographer and teacher and have exhibited many of my photographs across Canada and Europe. In 1994 I traveled to Iran to photograph gypsies which was part of a three years project to document the life of Rom people.

I am now conducting for my doctoral study which is focused on family carpet weavers in village settings in Iran. I want to explore the stories, life experiences, and social relations of each family member in relation to carpet-weaving at home and outside.
To do this and with your signed permission, I will ask you and each of your children (not younger than seven years old) to participate in informal hour-long individual interviews with me over a two-month period. If you grant permission for your child, 7 years old or older, to participate in this study, I will ask you to fill out a separate consent form for each child. After the interviews I will also ask you to participate in a family circle talk. The interviews will be done at a location that is most convenient to you. In order for me to remember your stories, our conversation will be recorded. The purpose of my study is to find out how carpet as a cultural and historical Iranian handicraft is

preserved through family tradition in a village setting and the role and contribution of each family member in maintaining and preserving this artifact. Family member contributions to carpet-weaving are not well understood in the literature on home craft production.
As well, I will take some still photographs and video footages to include in my data collection, and I will keep a copy of the negatives of these photographs for the rest of my career. Also, you and your child (ren) will get the opportunity to use a Polaroid camera to take photographs, which I will share with you in our family circle talks. It is my hope that the interviews will contribute to my research and stimulate new insights about your life. Your stories will help others to understand an invisible family life behind the carpet, which may eventually provide information to policy makers about how they might develop beneficial programs to carpet-weaving rural families.

The potential for harm to you as participant will be minimal. You may find it unpleasant to answer certain questions or be photographed. You may decline to answer any interview question, stop the interview at any time, decide not be photographed, or decide to no longer participate in the study at any time. It is important to me that you are comfortable in your interactions with me, so please feel free to state your preferences for involvement in my study at any time during my data collection.

Your names will not be mentioned in any publications or presentations. I will be the only person to have access to the recorded interviews. The typed-out interviews will be kept locked in a safe place at my sister's place in Tehran. Later, when I go to Canada, they will be kept locked in my office at University of Alberta.
I will use a pseudonym for each study participant when any information is shared in pictures, presentations or publications. Your original interview recording will be destroyed after 5 years.

In the event that you may have any concerns about this study, you can contact the following persons at any time:

Mrs. Djodat (my sister) @ 22701504 or Mr. (to be filled in when I go to Iran)

Verbal Video Consent

I have clearly explained to you the purpose of my study and how our conversations and photographs will be used. Now, with your permission I am going to videotape you while you are verbally agreeing to participate in my research and agree to be interviewed, photographed and videographed. As well, I am going to ask you to verbally consent the participation of your child(ren) in this study and agree that they will be interviewed, photographed and videographed.

Appendix B: Consent Forms

Appendix B1: Consent Forms for Adult Participants

Title: An Arts-based Narrative Inquiry of a Rural Carpet-Weaving Family in Iran

Principal Investigator: Sima Khorrami, PhD candidate
3rd Floor, Department of Human Ecology
University of Alberta
114 St - 89 Ave
Edmonton Alberta
Canada T6G 2E1
Telephone: (780) 492-3824
E-mail: khorrami@ualberta.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Marlene Cox-Bishop, EdD
Professor
3rd Floor, Department of Human Ecology
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114 St - 89 Ave
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I invite you to take part in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the traditional art of carpet-weaving in a rural family setting.

You may participate in this study if:

- you have been engaged in carpet-weaving at least for the last five years
- you are of Iranian heritage
- you speak Farsi, and
- you are willing to describe your experiences as a carpet weaver.

I will ask you to participate in individual interviews and family circle talks during a two- month period. The interviews will be done at a location that is good for you. As well, I am asking you to take photographs with a Polaroid camera provided by myself to you so that I might collect pictures of you and your family as they are involved with daily tasks associated with carpet-weaving. I am also asking permission to take photos of you as you do your carpet-weaving work.

All information will be held private. I will use an alias instead of your name when any information is shared with others in presentations or publications. The

transcripts of audio-recorded interviews will be typed out and returned to you for feedback and response. If you wish to keep some of the photographs taken during the study, I will give you a copy of them at the end of the study. All the transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years after the study is done, and after that time, the transcripts will be destroyed. You may decline to answer any interview question, stop the interview at any time, decide not be photographed, or decide to no longer participate in the study at any time without any penalty. It is important that you are comfortable in your interactions with me, so please feel free to state your preferences for involvement in my study at any time during my data collection.

I agree to take part in this study.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator Date

Appendix B2: Consent Form for Photographs from/of Adult Participants

Title: An Arts-based Narrative Inquiry of a Rural Carpet-Weaving Family in Iran

Principal Investigator: Sima Khorrami, PhD candidate
3rd Floor, Department of Human Ecology
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114 St - 89 Ave
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Supervisor: Dr. Marlene Cox-Bishop, EdD
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University of Alberta
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Telephone: (780) 492-3824

Sima Khorrami can use the photographs taken by and from me or given to her for this study. She can use them for presentations or publications. Any particular restrictions are listed below. If there are people other than myself in the photographs, Sima Khorrami will ask them verbally if she can use the picture for her research. I understand that the photographs will be disguised so people cannot be identified.

I understand Ms. Khorrami will keep a permanent record of the photographs with her for the rest of her career. I understand that I have the right to notify Sima that I would like a photograph(s) removed from the study up to.....without penalty.

Restrictions (if any):

I agree to have my photographs published with the restrictions indicated above

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in using photographs for this study and voluntarily agrees to have photographs with the limitations indicated above published.

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator Date

Appendix B3 Consent Forms from Parent/Guardian of Participant

Title: An Arts-based Narrative Inquiry of a Rural Carpet-Weaving Family in Iran

Principal Investigator: Sima Khorrami, PhD candidate
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114 St - 89 Ave
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Professor
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University of Alberta
114 St - 89 Ave
Edmonton Alberta
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Telephone: (780) 492-3824

This form provides a written record of parental consent for your child to participate in an interview and be photographed as they participate in carpet-weaving activities and family life. The purpose of this study is to explore the traditional art of carpet-weaving in a rural family setting.

Your child may participate in this study if:

- s/he is at least seven years old
- s/he is of Iranian heritage
- s/he speaks Farsi, and
- s/he is willing to describe her/his experiences as a carpet weaver

I will ask your child to participate with you in individual interviews and family talks during a two months period. The interviews will be done at a location that you find appropriate for your child and me. In addition to taking my own photographs of your child, I will ask your child to take photographs of her surrounding with a Polaroid camera provided by myself.

Only I will have access to your child's interview. I will use an alias instead of your child's name when any information is shared with others in pictures, presentations or publications. A copy of the photographs I have taken of your child will be sent to you as parent/guardian at the end of the study. The information typed from the audiotapes

will be kept in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years after the study is done and then destroyed. A separate consent to include the photographs in any presentations or publications will be obtained from you.

You have the right to withdraw your child from the study at any time without penalty.

I agree that my child may take part in this study

_____ _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian of Child Participant

Date

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees that her/his child may participate.

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix B4: Translator Confidentiality Agreement

Title: An Arts-based Narrative Inquiry of a Rural Carpet-Weaving Family in Iran

I, _____, the translator have been hired to translate the audiotapes obtained for the purpose of the above named project.

I agree to:

1. keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g. disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than Sima Khorrami.

2. keep all research information in any form or format (e.g. disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession.

3. return all research information in any form or format (e.g. disks, tapes, transcripts) to Sima Khorrami when I have completed the research tasks.

4. after consulting with Sima Khorrami, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to Sima Khorrami (e.g. information stored on computer hard drive).

_____	_____	_____
(print name)	(signature)	(date)

Researcher

_____	_____	_____
(print name)	(signature)	(date)